

SKILLS & EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME **REPORT**

OCTOBER 2011 – OCTOBER 2012



INTRODUCTION

In November 2011, St Johns Housing Trust was successful in securing Flexible Support Grant Funding from Jobcentre Plus for a Skills & Employment Worker.

Through the delivery of an eight-week programme, incorporating the principles of the Reversing the Spiral programme (see page 11), and designed to improve self-confidence and increase motivation, the post holder was employed to work with individuals with mental health issues who were not engaged with other initiatives to assist them in accessing education, training and ultimately employment services, providing tailored support to the individual throughout the process.

Although the funding was initially for a six-month pilot with a part-time post (25hrs a week), through additional funding from the NHS Big Society Transformation fund awarded in December 2012, the post was increased to full-time and its remit broadened with the additional aims of improving the wellbeing of clients, reducing their social isolation and supporting them to access healthcare services where necessary. With the early success of the Skills and Employment programme and the clear need for the service established, further funding from Jobcentre Plus was awarded and the pilot extended from six to twelve months, reaching an end in October 2012.

In total, the Skills and Employment Worker worked with over 80 clients, of whom 18 (24%) were supported to find and secure permanent employment. Many others gained vital qualifications and experience of working or volunteering, improved self-confidence and motivation, and on-going support from healthcare services that the scheme supported clients to access and continue to engage with.

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LEE'S* STORY

“When I started working with [the Skills and Employment Worker], I felt like my problems were understood – that it was all right if sometimes I didn’t feel up to it, and that it shouldn’t stop me from training or working.”

Lee suffered from depression, anxiety and panic attacks, and had been battling an alcohol dependency since his marriage broke down in 2008.

Lee was referred to the dual diagnosis service in 2011, where he received the support needed to address his mental health problems and alcohol abuse. During the latter stages of recovery, Lee sought new activities and challenges in order to remain positive and focused; to help keep his mind active and keep the thoughts which had caused him to feel depressed and had led to his alcohol dependency at bay.

Lee was encouraged to attend an appointment with the Skills and Employment Worker. Whilst he had made excellent progress, Lee remained concerned that his panic attacks would prevent him from making any long-term commitments in terms of training courses or employment. After he had expressed an interest in painting and decorating, the S&E Worker accompanied Lee to a meeting with the tutor of a 9-week course. Following a discussion where the S&E Worker helped Lee to explain his condition to the course tutor, Lee was assured that he could leave the course at any time should he feel the need to do so and he felt encouraged to enrol.

The Skills and Employment Worker met Lee on-site on his first day of the course to offer support and help to relieve any anxiety. Lee continued to attend regularly and completed the course. He is now employed by a local contractor and also volunteers with St Johns Housing Trust.

“I knew I needed to do something – to keep busy, but I didn’t want to start something and then let everyone down,” admitted Lee. “When I started working with [the Skills and Employment Worker], I felt like my problems were understood – that it was all right if sometimes I couldn’t do it, and that it shouldn’t stop me from training or working.”

DOUGIE'S* STORY

“[Becoming a chef] would be great and then I wouldn’t feel like I’d wasted my life.”

Dougie was orphaned and has lived either in care or in supported accommodation throughout his life. He developed a dependence upon alcohol and used cannabis as a coping mechanism to “blot out” thoughts concerning how his parents were killed.

After several months of working with the dual diagnosis service to address his substance abuse, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and stuck grief, Dougie was put in touch with the Skills and Employment Worker. Feeling more positive about his future than he had in years, Dougie revealed that he had once worked in a kitchen and had enjoyed the nature of the work. The S&E Worker provided him with information about a catering course offered through Bridge View Drop-In Centre’s personal development programme.

Dougie signed up for the course, attending regularly and gaining his Level 2 Food Hygiene certificate. As part of the course, and as part of a team, Dougie worked to prepare the food and serve at a function for over 60 guests.

Dougie is now contemplating “doing what my dad never did before he died” and qualifying as a chef: “it would be great and then I wouldn’t feel like I’d wasted my life. I’ve had a lot of help and couldn’t have done it without it. Thank you.”

THE SKILLS & EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME – PILOT SCHEME

“It has been found that 83% of people without work lack motivation and drive, and a staggering 46% don’t actively look for work, either by choice or because they genuinely don’t believe that they can secure a job. This shocking statistic shows how low self-esteem can create a mental obstacle in the process of looking for work.” DWP RESEARCH PAPER

Among the aims and objectives of St Johns Housing Trust’s dual diagnosis service is to link in with other relevant healthcare services and, in the latter stages of a client’s recovery, support individuals to access education, training and ultimately employment services. To this end, and in keeping with the service’s holistic (or ‘all-round’) approach, the team has always worked to impress upon clients the positive impact of engaging in some form of meaningful activity.

Through discussions between the dual diagnosis team and the Trust’s fundraising and business development departments, the benefits of establishing a direct link between the service and supporting clients to access education, training or employment services were recognised, and the need to appoint a member of staff specifically for this purpose was identified.

As a result, in October 2011, the organisation applied to Jobcentre Plus’s Flexible Support Grant Funding directive for the funding necessary to employ a **Skills and Employment Worker** (S&E Worker). The application was successful and, in November, funding was awarded for a 6-month pilot scheme with a part-time post (25 hours per week). The post holder’s remit was to work exclusively with clients of the dual diagnosis service who were not already engaged with other education and/or employment initiatives to deliver an 8-week programme aimed at supporting clients to access education, training, voluntary schemes or employment. As part of the Skills and Employment programme – as a highly beneficial prelude to it – clients were offered the opportunity to undertake the Reversing the Spiral programme.

Written and delivered by Mark Hambrook, Clinical Lead of the dual diagnosis service (but created externally to his work with the dual diagnosis service and St Johns Housing Trust), the Reversing the Spiral programme focuses on breaking free of ‘debilitating mindsets’ – psychological barriers that can prevent individuals from progressing and achieving what they would like, and have the potential, to achieve – improving self-confidence and increasing motivation. For more information on Reversing the Spiral, see page 11.

As the target client group were those not currently involved in education, training, volunteering or employment initiatives, many of the individuals that met with the criteria for the programme had long histories of non-engagement with comparable schemes, and many were socially isolated as a result. The vast majority had low-level skills attainment (86%), were long-term unemployed (79%) – including 17 clients (21%) who had never been employed.

As products of the social isolation resulting from long-term non-engagement, low levels of confidence, self-esteem and motivation can make it difficult for individuals to access and subsequently continue to attend and complete courses – however much the benefits are highlighted, or how strong the desire for a ‘fresh start’. Therefore, the Skills and Employment programme sought to embed soft skills development from the outset, with workshops centring around confidence building, working in a group setting, team work and communication skills, developing further the principles set out through the Reversing the Spiral course which the majority of clients undertook.

With self-confidence restored and motivation levels increased, the S&E Worker worked with clients to explore their interests, personal development goals and aspirations, before researching relevant and appropriate educational, training, voluntary or employment schemes for the individual to consider. However, even with increased levels of self-confidence and motivation, in the main, the bulk of clients would require further support throughout the application or enrolment processes, and on-going support to continue to attend and complete the course undertaken. With this need recognised, an important facet of the Skills and Employment programme was the provision of on-going support tailored to the specific requirements of the individual.

AS A RESULT OF THE SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME:-

- **80** clients received entry to employment support;

Of whom:-

- **34** clients (43%) undertook and completed NCON and/or motivational training courses;
- **48** (60%) completed the 3-part Reversing the Spiral programme, designed to improve self-confidence and increase motivation;
- **32** clients (40%) completed the BTEC in Work Skills course and successfully gained the qualification;
- **28** clients (35%) undertook volunteer or work experience placements.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE:

“The latter stages of recovery are a critical time for clients, with the likelihood of relapse significantly reduced if individuals can be supported to access and engage in some form of meaningful activity, paving the way towards achieving a greater degree of independence.”

The grants from Jobcentre Plus (Flexible Support Grant Funding) and the NHS Big Society Transformation fund from Jobcentre Plus enabled St Johns Housing Trust to put in place and develop a direct link between the clinical and therapeutic interventions of the dual diagnosis service with educational and employment-focused initiatives (many of which are offered through the organisation's Education and Training Department). As a result, the organisation was able to reach out to many of the most vulnerable and needy within our community, providing a support package that was at once holistic and fully cohesive.

Whilst the dual diagnosis service has been highly successful in achieving its aims, catering for levels of unmet need far greater than originally anticipated, the clinical treatment and therapy provided by the service is not sufficiently holistic nor far-reaching in itself: in order to ensure the greatest possible chance of recovery for clients, it is necessary to continue to build upon the clinical-therapeutic work delivered through the service by providing a direct route into education, training, volunteer or employment services. The latter stages of recovery are a critical time for clients, with the likelihood of relapse significantly reduced if individuals can be supported to access and engage in some form of meaningful activity, paving the way towards achieving a greater degree of independence.

Following the unqualified success of the Skills and Employment programme pilot, and with the need for the service recognised and to some extent quantified, St Johns Housing Trust will seek to secure funding to continue and develop the programme further – a programme which the organisation believes to be fundamental to the recovery and reintegration of dual diagnosis clients. The possibility of working in partnership with other organisations in order to deliver this vital service is also being explored.



ALISON'S* STORY

"I feel like I've got my life back – it's almost as if the last few years didn't happen."

Alison was training in childcare in 2004, when a family issue lead to her becoming depressed and leaving the course. Before the year was out, Alison reached a stage where she was self-medicating with alcohol and would not leave the house for days.

In 2012, Alison met a new partner who encouraged her to access the dual diagnosis service and get help with her issues. Having regained control of her alcohol abuse, Alison was referred by her dual diagnosis worker to the Skills and Employment programme.

After regular one-to-one sessions with the Skills and Employment Worker, Alison felt ready to consider a return to education. Together with the S&E Worker, Alison visited Lowestoft College to access information about childcare courses offered, and, having found the right course for her, applied and was accepted. The S&E Worker provided Alison with further support, assisting her with organising a work placement – a requirement of her course.

Alison encountered several obstacles during the first few weeks of her course, precipitated by her anxiety issues. However, with the on-going support of the S&E Worker and the dual diagnosis team, she remained positive and focused and continued to attend. Alison feels confident that she will complete the course (July 2013) and will go onto secure employment following its culmination.

"I feel like I've got my life back - it's almost as if the last few years didn't happen," stated Alison. "I'll always be very grateful for the help and support that the dual diagnosis team and the [Skills & Employment] worker gave me."

STEPHEN'S* STORY

"[The S&E Worker] helped me to do things at my own pace, never rushing me or making me do things before I felt ready to."

Stephen was employed in a high-pressured and stressful environment throughout the 1990s. Following relocation and the breakdown of his marriage, he found himself out of work, suffering from severe depression and self-medicating with alcohol and other illicit substances.

With the support of the dual diagnosis service, Stephen was able to manage his depression and anxiety without relying upon substance misuse. After several months, his dual diagnosis worker felt that Stephen had reached the stage where he should begin engaging in some form of meaningful activity, and encouraged him to meet with the Skills and Employment Worker.

With the S&E Worker, Stephen explored and became interested in undertaking several courses and training programmes, including the Reversing the Spiral, Developing Personal Confidence and Assertiveness and Understanding Stress and Stress Management. Whilst completing the courses, Stephen was encouraged to volunteer with St Johns Housing Trust, providing him with invaluable experience of working within the support sector. On occasion, Stephen's anxiety would resurface, forcing him to take time out from volunteering, but with the support of the S&E Worker, he would return as soon as he felt able.

With increased confidence and motivation, and a career now firmly in mind, Stephen undertook the BTEC in Work Skills and successfully gained the qualification. He is now in employment as a Support Worker with another provider of accommodation and support services within the local area.

"It was great having somebody who knew about my problems and didn't pretend they didn't exist," Stephen stated about the S&E Worker. "[The S&E Worker] helped me to do things at my own pace, never rushing me or making me do things before I felt ready to."

ST JOHNS HOUSING TRUST

St Johns Housing Trust started as the Lowestoft Night Shelter in 1975. For over thirty-five years, the organisation has worked to provide accommodation and support services to homeless, vulnerable and socially-excluded people.

With the opening of the Fyffe Centre in 1985 – the first purpose-built supported accommodation scheme not only in the UK but Western Europe – the organization has continued to blaze a trail, even affecting changes within the law and legislation around homelessness.

With four supported accommodation schemes in Lowestoft (Fyffe Centre, a direct access hostel for single homeless adults with Bostock House providing move-on accommodation; Haven Court for single or expecting Mothers and Phoenix House, a direct access hostel for young people), Admiralty Terrace in Great Yarmouth (providing accommodation and support for Prolific and Other Priority Offenders - PPOs), and John Room House in Thetford (single homeless), the Trust has worked tirelessly to prevent and relieve homelessness and to raise awareness of the issue.

Since 2007, the Trust has diversified its services with the addition of **Bridge View Drop In Centre**, a **Dual Diagnosis Service** (working with individuals with concurrent mental health and substance misuse issues), **Family** and **Young Fathers Support** services. However, it is the organisation's emergence as a provider of high quality education, training and employment services which has marked the most dramatic shift.

2013 will see St Johns Housing Trust rebranding itself as **Access Community Trust**.

THE DUAL DIAGNOSIS SERVICE

"[The dual diagnosis team] helped me all the way through – from when I was very unwell...and then when I started to feel better and wanted to get back into work." KR, Dual Diagnosis Service client

The dual diagnosis service was set up in 2009, following the award of funding from Great Yarmouth and Waveney NHS Trust. With over 30 years of providing accommodation and support services, St Johns Housing Trust was uniquely placed to recognise the need for a service to provide vital support to those with concurrent mental health and substance misuse issues (a 'dual diagnosis') whom, for a variety of reasons, find it difficult to access or continue to engage with mainstream services.

With twice-weekly public access clinics at Bridge View Drop-In Centre (Commercial road, Lowestoft), those in need of support are able to access the service without the need to make an appointment or be formally referred. This has been key in making the service and the support it provides more accessible, allowing the team to reach out to individuals who might otherwise be discouraged by more formal access routes. Home visits have also been used to support clients with mobility problems or those with chronic anxiety.

With the recovery model at its core, the service provides 'holistic' (or 'all-round') support, linking closely with other mental health and substance misuse services and providers of education, training and employment advice to ensure support throughout a client's recovery.

Consisting of a Clinical Lead, a Nurse Therapist and a Support Worker, the dual diagnosis team also offers a number of training programmes and workshops for professionals working with clients with mental health needs (Basic Mental Health, Personality Disorder and Deliberate Self-Harm, Working in the Spirit of Motivational Interviewing), and also clients in the latter stages of recovery – in particular, the Reversing the Spiral programme, introduced in 2011, was created to improve self-confidence, increase motivation and help clients to continue making progress in terms of both their recovery and re-integration into society.

REVERSING THE SPIRAL

Most of us have encountered times within the course of our lives when everything gets 'too much' and we no longer feel in control. We can feel emotionally drained (in the 'minus of life's continuum'), with circular, ruminative thoughts producing few, if any, solutions. During such times, we are more likely to seek relief in alcohol or other substances and engage in damaging behaviours.

In the **first** section of Reversing the Spiral (entitled **Roadblocks to Wellbeing**), possible causes and reasons for the perpetuation of debilitating mindsets are explored. Tools and techniques are offered to help recognise, remove and prevent these blocks to wellbeing occurring, enabling us to rise out of the minus of life's continuum and reversing our downward spiral.

Section Two aims to help individuals to develop **resilience** by raising self-esteem, understanding the concepts of emotional and social intelligence and developing a 'growth mindset'. By developing these resourceful skills, we can become more resilient emotionally, reducing the likelihood of relapse.

Section Three (Flourishing) examines living within an optimal range of human functioning, broadening and building positive emotions such as fulfilment, meaning, purpose, happiness and self-actualization – the epitome of positive mental health.

The course is infused with key elements of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Mindfulness and Motivational Interviewing (MI).

ST JOHNS HOUSING TRUST

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