

**Project Name: Jigsaw Prospects – Employability for Mental Health**  
**Lead Organisation: Trinity Community Partnership**  
**Local Project Number: ESF/0203/010**

## **PROJECT DEVELOPMENT**

It must be said from the outset that this client group has been particularly challenging. People who are recovering from mental ill health do not progress in an even pattern. Progress is often extremely slow and can be very erratic. The chances of suffering a setback are high as the ability to tolerate life's changes and setbacks is often very low. This has been the reason why we incorporated so many confidence building and personal development courses into our programme.

As the project evolved it was realised that if LSC targets were to be met then we would have to be more selective in our approach, for that reason we learned to improve our initial appraisal and selection processes. During recent months our emphasis has been to focus primarily on pre-employment training. This more specialised approach has required us to improve our networks so that we make better quality referrals for those clients we have been unable to assist. We are confident though that this more selective approach will improve our retention rates, increase the number of qualifications obtained and increase the number achieving work or volunteering in the future. It also differentiates our services from other providers and makes it clearer to external agencies where we fit in the supply chain.

### **Service-User led:**

This year the Project has developed a distinctive service user led approach. This is considered to be an example of best practice by the local Social Services Mental Health Team. Three of the four staff have previously experienced mental health problems themselves and were themselves service users at Jigsaw Prospects.

The advantages of adopting this approach are that staff can truly empathise with service users, as they have first hand experience and insights about choosing the most appropriate pathways towards recovery. They are familiar with existing networks and have often developed contacts and access to peer support mechanisms of their own.

Service users have also been consulted directly on which learning activities and support programmes will be the most appropriate in their progression to employment. We consider this to be an excellent example of adopting a learner led approach to course development and using feedback to improve our services.

## **TEAM-BUILDING & SUPPORTING STAFF**

A completely new team has been established at Jigsaw Prospects, following a very difficult year when six of the Prospects staff left their positions. Due to this setback valuable development time was lost in recruiting suitable staff. The

Project is still one whole time member of staff down – the Manager, although the post is currently being admirably covered by the deputy. On reflection the Project has managed to survive this and has still achieved very significant outputs.

A team-building day was organised to improve project performance, motivate staff and clarify objectives. Due to the difficult nature of working with people with mental health problems internal support systems have been developed and staff undertake regular monthly supervision sessions. Team meetings are held on a fortnightly basis, which will hopefully help with staff retention.

### **Question 1.**

#### **Networking and Partnership working:**

Two part-time outreach workers have now been recruited to Jigsaw Prospects. This has improved opportunities for networking and liaising with other service providers. Excellent working relationships with relevant partners have been established and nurtured, this has helped to improve day to day practical activities and course content.

For example:-

- Links with Ribble Valley Mental Health Team have been forged. Regular meetings take place and Jigsaw Prospects take part in the teams' Steering Group meetings. Discussions have taken place recently around adopting a more formal 'service level agreement' to deliver outreach services in deeper rural areas for clients that might otherwise have been excluded from mainstream learning opportunities. Jigsaw Prospects activities are now included in the 'what's on guide' and newsletter mailed out to approx. 200 service users in the Ribble Valley. The Community Psychiatric Nurses now also escort clients down to Jigsaw Prospects to introduce us to their clients.
- Activities around World Mental Health Day also themed around partnership working. Jigsaw Prospects service users decided upon a *Roadshow* for the day, and invited service providers to join in. Agencies included: -
  - Trinity Community Volunteers & Co-ordinators
  - Community Voluntary Services
  - East Lancs Advocacy
  - Holistic Therapies tutor from Accrington College
  - Ribble Valley Mental Health team
  - Hyndburn & Ribble Valley domestic violence team

The team toured the more isolated rural areas of Ribble Valley in a mini-bus to promote our mental health support activities and were interviewed by Radio Lancashire during their tour.

### **TARGETING 'HARD TO REACH' GROUPS**

Jigsaw Prospects has planned and broadened its horizons this year in relation to its target group.

Having made links with Hyndburn and Ribble Valley domestic violence team, our uptake of services from women who have been sufferers of domestic violence has increased. We are, as a result, considering running a women's only group.

- We are also working in partnership with Blackburn Community Drug team, who now hold a fortnightly meeting/support group at Jigsaw Prospects, so that clients may also access our services.
- We have also made a link with Sahara Project at Preston to help us to attract women of ethnic minority to engage in activities at Jigsaw Prospects, aiming toward more diversity.

Social Services have been particularly supportive in helping us develop a new focus for this project. This was because no other organisation in our region has operated a project of this type outside the statutory sector, the aims of the project meet the needs of the National Service Framework and it offers a credible alternative to traditional methods of support.

Some learners have enrolled on our courses because the agency is not part of a statutory support system; this is good because it reaches a new group who might not normally have an opportunity to participate in learning. On the other hand Social Services have been in the process of writing a new delivery plan for the area and Jigsaw Prospects will be expected to play a significant role in the delivery of training to those who are more 'work ready' and access their services. The independence of this project therefore is central to its degree of success.

Employing Service Users has been something of an innovatory concept. It is not without its pitfalls and we have learned a great deal during the period, particularly in relation to the difficulties people face during the transition from service user to service developer/trainer. This has prompted us to work more closely with Social Services and the Health Service in order to develop a more robust client referral and assessment processes. Staff training will need to play an increasingly important part of future project development. Retention of client confidentiality and the sharing of personal information remains a key issue for this group as there are tremendous sensitivities for service users. In fact many learners are often reluctant to even admit that they are disabled/ or suffer from mental ill health.

### **Question 2.**

This project did not aim to deliver capacity building as part of its remit.

### **Question 3.**

#### **Measurement of beneficiary soft outcomes**

Improvements in interpersonal, organisation, analytical and personal skills are critical to the needs of this group. Sometimes the first steps that people take when recovering from mental ill health would appear to be ordinary activities to people who have not experienced these problems. Activities like coming out of the house, joining in a conversation with strangers or participating in group discussions can be daunting for some. It would be unrealistic to expect these

returners to take up accredited courses from the start. Confidence building is often one of the first courses people attend when they come to us.

We have found that if people can improve their own self motivation and personal confidence they will often begin to look for new work or volunteering opportunities on their own initiative. Early interventions are very important if self confidence is to be improved. Only after this has been achieved can we begin to offer courses that equip individuals with up to date and relevant skills that enable them to participate in employment. The benefit of designing our courses in this way though enables learners to see that they are progressing towards a new goal.

### **Positive Outcomes for Learners**

Our initial targeted profile estimated that we would achieve 45 learners, ultimately the actual figure was almost double that at 83. However, retention of clients was poor, and actual positive outcomes in terms of

- Working towards an accredited course
- Further education
- Paid employment
- Voluntary work

was only attained by approximately 50% of our service users. It is worth noting however that many soft outcomes i.e. such as increased confidence and wellness were achieved. If this is what provides the self motivation for people to access work or participate in volunteering we consider that the programme has achieved its objective, particularly as this target group takes much longer to achieve measurable results such as accredited qualifications.

We have attempted to measure the soft outcomes of our beneficiaries in many ways:

Interpersonal skills are the key area of achievement for this project. The very fact that people are prepared to participate actively in group activities and discussions can be a huge leap for many. The fact that we have managed to employ a number of service users themselves is also significant. The role of outreach worker can be a very demanding one for anyone, but it is especially so for those who lack self esteem.

Personal organisation skills have been improved, this is evidenced by increased attendance at events and a willingness to work towards a qualification and complete portfolio work. Evidence of client progress and other achievements are kept centrally in the learner's individual training file. Evidence is sometimes collated in written form, sometimes in photographic form.

### **Summary**

Overall the project has proved to be a tremendous success for both staff and learners alike, the delivery team have begun to deliver a much more professional and focussed service that leads towards a recognised goal, employment. This is evidenced in a new business and action plan that builds on the experience gained in this programme. Meanwhile all staff have acquired

new skills of their own, which we know will be relevant to the needs of the target group, now and in the future. Author Peter Kay - January 2004