Improving outcomes for offenders with a Learning Disability or Difficulty

European alternatives to custody workshop.

By Amy Hall

Equality Officer

What we will look at

- Context setting - Jenny Talobt
- Cheshire & Greater Manchester NOMS pilot - Amy Hall
- Project model
- Customer journeys
- Data analysis
- Key findings
- Recommendations
- Closing statements - Jenny Talbot
- Questions

Context setting - Jenny Talbot

Improving outcomes for offenders with a Learning Disability or Difficulty.
NOMS communication pilot 2014/2015
An evaluation by Cheshire & Greater Manchester Community Rehabilitation Company.

- Between April 2013 to April 2015, Greater Manchester Probation Trust (GMPT), and latterly Cheshire and Greater Manchester Community Rehabilitation Company (CGMCRC), undertook a two year piece of work to improve outcomes for offenders with a Learning Disability or Difficulty (LDD). In the second year the pilot was financed by NOMS and delivery supported by the CGMCRC
- The project cohort was primarily from the Intensive Alternative To Custody (ICO). Males ages 18-24.

Project model - operational

- Staff development and skills building.
- Identification through the use of an oasys algorithm
- Communication reflection tool used to identify strengths/weaknesses.
- Individual formulation and inclusion in sentence plan
- Small changes make big differences

Customer journey

- In partnership with New Charter a number of customer journeys were undertaken to identify the experiences of individuals within the criminal justice system who have a communication need.
- 6 offenders' whose social careers were modelled as part of the evaluation presented multiple situations, circumstances and behaviours in common
- There were lengthy histories of **unemployment**, **mental health issues, and a significant lack of social capital.**
- It was clear for the journeys that they had all had multiple contacts with statutory front line workers, yet a communication need had not previously been identified.
- The customer journeys also detail the various costs associated with elements of services experienced by the individuals; although it would be impossible and reminds to attempt calculate the potential savings based in just 6 cases, the costs shown demonstrate that the continual involvement in and with services, has been both costly and lengthy.

Data analysis

- 400 communication reflections tools were carried out across the pilot areas.
- These tools captured data on the various communication needs.
- Also captured demographics; gender, age and physical disabilities.
- The data was then analysed and patterns or trends identified.
- A total score of 70 or under suggest that a person has significant communication difficulties that will impact on their ability to understand others and to express themselves.
- The average score of all tools analysed was 83-84. The spread of scores was between 40-111. 70 cases (30.9%) scored 70 or under. In line with current research.
- Common themes emerged from the research including issues with sequencing, recall, time telling and word definition.

Key findings

- Communication is vital in our ability to understand and be understood. If we cannot understand what is being said to us then we cannot process it. If we cannot process what is being said to us then we cannot respond appropriately.

- If we have difficulties responding then we can be misinterpreted or disadvantaged (for example if we don't understand something, common responses can include frustration, anger & disengagement).

- A service users ability to successfully navigate the Criminal Justice System and other agencies depends on their ability to understand, process, respond, retain and sequence information. Having poor communication skills will often mean having a poor experience of the criminal justice system.

- Diagnosis is helpful for those who reach appropriate thresholds however the majority of clients do not reach thresholds whereby care packages or services would be accessible for them.

Key findings

- 'The diagnosis trap' applies when practitioners refer an individual for assessment and then 'wait' for that assessment to be completed before continuing with their service or intervention, by which time supervision has often ended. Even if a diagnosis *is* made during the period of supervision, it tells a practitioner very little about how to actually work with the individual.

- Crucial elements to successfully embedding a project were identified as; staff awareness, appropriate tools for assessment, recording and flagging mechanisms, information sharing mechanisms, accessible interventions and documents.

- Developing Information sharing policies and a joined-up multi agency response is critical. Information is very often known but not shared.

- Co-production involving (ex) service users is vital to ensure that processes and interventions are designed by those who will be using them.

- A 'Golden thread' of accessibility should run through all operational/strategic development. If interventions and documents are made accessible to those with an LDD, then they may also be accessible for those with mental health issues, substances misuse issues and language barriers.

- Key messages are relevant to all organisations. Alongside the moral and legal motivators for developing this work, is the key premise that engaging more effectively from the outset will reduce reoffending and relieve revolving door service demands.

Example

Billy has problems with certain communications skills.
In particular sequencing, recall and word definition.
This effects:
Organising himself to get to the probation office.
The way he recounts his offence.
How he communicates remorse.
How he is sentenced.
How is is 'labeled' by workers.
How he engages with his sentence.
His understanding of the sentence.

Recommendations

KEY FINDING: Difficulties in communication can be misunderstood or misinterpreted by practitioners as 'bad behaviour'.

RECOMMENDATION: Raising staff awareness of learning disability, learning difficulty and communication issues is essential in allowing them to explore and examine behaviour, and consider communication difficulties as a underpinning factor.

KEY FINDING: Diagnosis of a LDD is a lengthy process. Diagnosis provides a label but not a formulation of how to work with an individual.

RECOMMENDATION: Using a tool such as the Communication Reflection tool, provides practitioners with an understanding of an individual's communications strengths and weaknesses. This can enable reasonable adjustments to be made to the sentence plan, promoting improved engagement.

Recommendations

KEY FINDING: Clients have usually had multiple contacts with multiple organisations without their communication need being identified or evidence by front line workers.

RECOMMENDATION: The sharing of information between agencies around an individual's communication abilities is vital in ensuring joined up provision. The majority of those with a communication need had previously been in contact with social services, criminal justice agencies, mental health services and Benefits services; yet their communication need appeared not to have been recognised.

KEY FINDING: Commonly identified communication issues included problems understanding word definitions, poor recall and memory, difficulties sequencing information and issues with timekeeping.

RECOMMENDATION: Small changes can make big differences. Discussing with a client the best way to deliver information, using jargon free language and capitalising on a clients existing strategies can lead to changes which significantly improve their compliance and behaviour.

Next steps

- Roll out project across Cheshire & Manchester

- Autism standards pilot

- Embed in 'business as usual model'

- Continue with raising the awareness of the agenda.

Closing statements

Any Questions ?

Amy Hall
Equality and diversity manager CGMCRC
amy.Hall@manchester.probation.gsi.gov.uk
07795540437