Doncaster – Asset Based Assessment & Review

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| **Introduction** |
| Up and down the country service users and social workers are frustrated with the way assessments are undertaken. Recently at a Think Local Act Personal (TLAP) conference a council worker said:  “There are too many stages of assessment, contact and supported self-assessment. Then waiting for a Resource Allocation System (RAS) and then support planning and review. The practitioners don’t spend enough time with the clients to really get to know them and develop person centred plans.”    The Care Act now requires councils to adopt a different approach to assessing need. In Clause 1 of the Care Act Councils are required *to take a holistic view of the individual and promote general well-being.* The challenge here is for councils to move away from the traditional community care assessment which has tended to be based on what a service user cannot do and the services that they need to provide them. Councils and social workers need to move forward instead to implement an approach that engages the service user in a broader conversation about their whole life. An asset based assessment as is being developed in Doncaster facilitates this shift. Questions arise like: How do we support social workers to give up the old way of doing assessments and adopt an asset based approach? How does the council can make this change within fixed and reducing resources? How do we engage service users and carers in these different conversations? |
| **Background information** |
| Doncaster identified early on that their care management system and supporting paperwork were not going to fit the requirements of the Care Act. They have taken a system and across council approach to developing an asset based assessment and review process. They have achieved change by taking an involving, supporting, training and changing the culture *together* approach. The project has focused largely on the paperwork and processes of assessment, resource allocation, care and support planning and review. The Team had free reign to redesign the whole pathway since local evidence highlighted service user and practitioner dissatisfaction with current processes.  The council’s new process is called *the assessment and review of care and support needs document*. This replaces the community care assessment in Doncaster. They created a new assessment form that focuses on assets rather than on deficits and service prescriptions. It takes as its premise the fact that social workers are skilled in eliciting necessary detail using conversational approaches when working with service users and their carers. They steer this conversation naturally to establish need. They promote a positive discussion that reveals what the service user wants to achieve. They establish the user’s natural network of support and understand how it can contribute to maintaining their independence. They focus on coproducing outcomes with the user to be achieved with their own resources and where necessary with the councils. They don’t need to tick boxes on a form to help them work any of this out. This shift of focus is set in the context of a move to Asset Based Social care and is described pictorially in the ABC Onion diagram attached. |
| **Findings** |
| Doncaster Council has re-scripting the social care journey for Adults with care and support needs. The Team comprised largely of qualified social workers championed the reclaiming of Social Work from a techno-managerial to a much more individualist-reformist approach.  Drawn together from a range of disciplines and with expertise in working with the full breadth of specific client groups they developed products and processes that underpin and support their practice, are Care Act ready, enable a shift to outcomes focused, asset-based working and facilitate them to do 'real social work'. The new process is driven through natural conversations that explore service user’s strengths, need and networks of support. Practitioners are able to fully understand their circumstances and desired outcomes, enabling truly personalised, co-produced solutions to be developed in a genuine partnership.  Before developing their own new process Doncaster explored others areas to see what was out there already. In close consultation with service users it became quickly apparent that none of the approaches currently being utilised in the council or in the region by other councils were going to fit the bill. Being involved in a Research in Practice for Adults (RIPFA) project to describe what a good assessment looks like really helped develop the councils thinking. In changing how assessments and reviews would be done the council looked at the supporting culture change that would be required. With an external trainer and facilitator the council mapped culture. This was a significant step as without the focus on culture change and liberating the social work profession change would have been nothing more than a new paperwork exercise. Alongside the work on training staff and supporting them to think about how to undertake an asset based approach and asset based conversations with service users and carers the team kept in mind the whole system of support. (see ABC appendix attached).Staff have been really positive about the changes made and a number of them have commented:  **Jenny**  **“Being involved in the rescript group has been a great commitment, it has given me the opportunity to speak on behalf of my social work colleagues and inform practice.”**  **Vicky**  **“Being part of the rescript group has increased my confidence and helped me develop as a Social Work practitioner. I feel that the new assessment process that we have developed feels like true social work! The work has reignited my passion for Social Work.”**  There were challenges like securing the commitment of senior leadership to the project to release practitioners regularly to be able to reflect and innovate in a secure creative space and in protected time. Colleague buy-in across the workforce was another significant challenge. Sustained message reinforcement through a programme of change workshops together with regular updates on progress provided from the team secured approval. |
| **Solution** |
| They have developed a new service user pathway using critical reflection and analysis as key tools, drawing on their practice experience and value base to ensure the processes uphold principles of anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice. An innovation has been the development of an ‘outcomes statement’ that has been latterly modified to form a Care and Support plan that clearly outlines agreed outcomes, needs met through informal support via natural networks, strengths and assets, and eligible unmet need, resources allocated forming a Personal Budget and a decision with regard to an appropriate money management option, seeking to support self-management via a Direct Payment wherever possible. A new Direct Payment policy and new Resource Allocation System (RAS) have been developed also. Doncaster has demonstrated that processes can be changed which is not new across social care. But we are left with the question:What is the point of changing processes if we do not also liberate social workers and service users to really own the new processes? |