

Real Work Opportunities for People with Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) and Progressive Neurological Conditions (PNC)

Laura Murphy, Chris Jones, Charlotte Hearn & Caroline Knight, Priory Brain Injury Services

Providing opportunities for green behaviour is a key concept within the RAID approach in strengthening positive behaviour and allowing challenging behaviour to fade away. The RAID approach is a relentlessly positive approach to working with extreme behaviour (Davies, 2000). Teams working with people with challenging behaviour are particularly encouraged to consider activities that are intrinsically rewarding to the person. This submission describes an example of how such opportunities have been provided for service users within Priory Brain Injury Services.

The Real Work Opportunities (RWO) programme was originally devised to explore meaningful vocational occupation for people within a forensic learning disabilities population. Cox et al (2014) noted that often service users lacked the optimum skills to allow them to be “work ready” and developed a 12-week programme to assist people in gaining relevant skills. Special consideration was given to ethical issues such as ensuring people received payment for work completed. The programme also considered risk and those detained under the Mental Health Act, which limited their opportunities for community access. The programme involved setting up job roles to simulate the real work process. Service users in the programme demonstrated skills development throughout the employment process.

Within Priory Brain Injury Services a modified RWO programme has been introduced over the last three years.

The RWO programme allows people to have access to all the skills, tools and support to best prepare them for gaining either employment or voluntary work as part of their inpatient stay or after discharge. A “preparing for work” programme is used which supports the service user with all of the pre-work skills such as CV writing and interview tips. To be successful in the RWO role service users complete the conventional route of employment tasks including applying for the role, completing a CV, being interviewed and if successful completing any relevant training. The service user is gradually given more responsibility as the RWO proceeds. At the end of the programme, the service user can use the RWO to add to their CV alongside supervising staff as referees. Examples of current active roles include: Grounds Keeper, Vehicle Maintenance Technician, Patient Liaison Link and Animal Care Coordinator.

Further modification of the programme has been made specific to the needs of people with brain injury or neurological condition. Physical disabilities are prevalent within this population and therefore roles and environments were adapted to make them accessible. For one service user undertaking the vehicle maintenance role, standalone steps were provided to assist the service user to get in and out of the vehicle and adapted tools were provided to ease the ability to reach into the vehicle. In another case, a service user with a quiet voice was given a microphone headset to amplify the voice in their training role. The whole programme was amended to last for longer (24 weeks) to cope with the cognitive challenges such as retaining and embedding new skills common for this population. Prompts and reminders that could be gradually phased out were built in where relevant.

One service user initially failed to rise from his bed for work but the member of staff working with him gradually set expectations to increase independence until he was able to meet at the right time and place ready for work. Feedback given at two weekly intervals in the original programme proved to be difficult to accept for some and so on the spot feedback was provided which service users were more likely to relate and respond to due to memory limitations. Finally, roles were created that were person centred by considering the interests of the service user, skills relevant to their goals or drawn from their long term well established and procedurally learnt skills.

The RWO programme has been audited annually to ensure integrity, fairness and innovative practice and development within the programme. Many positive outcomes have been found. Examples include;

- G who would not engage in any previously offered therapy and appeared only interested in seeking illegal drugs channelled his interests into growing vegetables,
- M who spent time frequently screaming showed dramatically reduced levels of this when she commenced her role as a trainer.
- L who successfully gained a liaison role in representing the views of his peers in meetings reported finding the feeling of doing things for other people fulfilling.

In the last two years, 11 different work roles were created and 19 service users actively engaged in the roles. One person successfully gained a voluntary position in the community following the programme and another returned to paid employment. One person presented the programme with staff at several external conferences and another returned as an outpatient to continue his role post discharge into the community.

Service user comments about RWO:

"It gets me off the ward"

"I know I can't go back to (my old job) and this is helping me start over again"

"I enjoy working alongside (staff)"

"These are everyday skills in the real world"

"Something to help you get better and engage in work when I leave to help get employment"

"More things to do"

"Something to help others"

Commissioner and family member comments:

"Amazed to see how well (he) is engaged in comparison to when I last saw them"

"Perfect as helps occupy their mind"

References:

Cox, A. et al. (2014). Real Work Opportunities: establishing an accessible vocational rehabilitation programme within a forensic intellectual disability service. Journal of Intellectual Disabilities and Offending Behaviour, 5(4), 160-166.

Davies, W. (2000). *The RAID Manual: A Relentlessly Positive Approach to Working with Extreme Behaviour*. Leicester, The APT Press.