

Transcript

# Leadership stories: Nether Johnstone House

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Iriss

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# Introduction

This transcript was taken from the recording **Leadership stories: Nether Johnstone House** which is part of [Leadership stories: developing effective supervision](#)

## Transcript

Nether Johnstone House is an independent community based service that supports young people with a range of complex needs, predominantly through their residential accommodation on the outskirts of Johnstone in Renfrewshire. In 2014 a number of issues arose that led the organisation to look at what measures they could take to ensure safe care and support for their young people. A new management team was employed to provide structure, guidance and direction. This refreshed the staff team and led on to a programme of sweeping changes, whilst maintaining the organisation's operational viability. After two years of hard work and dedication positive changes were noticeable and the team felt able to take their foot off the pedal and breathe a sigh of relief. After such a difficult period they felt that they could relax for a moment and focus on development.

Throughout the turnaround period, Nether Johnstone House had maintained a good relationship with their inspector. The inspector understood the organisation's past and where it had been coming from. Now a new inspector came in who had not been witness to the transformation. They were able to point out key areas for development. One of these being supervision. Although supervision was being carried out thoroughly, it was often informal, meaning that the paper trail and evidencing was lacking. This didn't support the organisation's policy on supervision.

Initially, the team were left feeling disappointed, hurt and angry. They felt that they had worked hard, and greatly improved outcomes for young

people, parents and stakeholders. The report was a bitter pill to swallow, but nonetheless, after some reflection they could understand that this created an opportunity for them to further develop themselves.

They responded by launching a consultation to develop a robust, highly systematised structure for supervision to take place, including checks and balances to ensure that the systems were being upheld and maintained. This gave the management team a sense of satisfaction. Things were being done properly, and they were providing all the evidence that the Care Inspectorate required. Staff reported that they felt increasingly supported but improvements in practice were minimal, compared to the level of effort going into producing evidence. There was a danger of supervision becoming a process for process sake.

Members of the management team identified that staff leading shifts were often lacking the leadership skills to carry out the supervision process confidently. In light of this, the Service Manager attended an Iriss/SSSC event on the recently developed SSSC Leadership Logic Model, which outlines how good leadership can lead to positive outcomes. After an application process, Iriss and SSSC invited Nether Johnstone House to be a project partner. For the first workshop there was an expectation that they would supply a degree of leadership training to enhance the supervision process, and that the team would learn a few tricks for developing a more authoritative stance. However, the project proved far more complex and self-analytical than anticipated.

Iriss and the SSSC began an appreciative inquiry process, asking about the best experiences the management team had of leadership and supervision and linking them to where they wanted to get to. Through facilitated sessions, Nether Johnstone House were supported to then ask, define and answer their own question, which became “Can we use supervision to improve staff leadership skills?” The process opened by exploring what leadership meant to the people involved, drawing on staff members experiences of being lead well. Secondly, they explored supervision, and

what that meant to those taking part. Often asking difficult questions, the project facilitation team would allow for extensive silences, and shy away from guiding, or rescuing participants. As in person centred counselling, the facilitators didn't seek to tell the organisation what was wrong but enabled the participants to draw their answers out themselves.

Eventually, the key issue began to emerge: supervision was being done for the Care Inspectorate, and was not focusing enough on staff and their needs. They also discovered the Continuous Learning Framework structure that they were using wasn't working well in the context, and that people were not responding well to one-on-one supervision.

After the first appreciative inquiry workshop, the organisation entered a period of discussion and reflection. The management team replicated the appreciative questions they were asked by SSSC and Iriss, but with the wider staff team. It was discovered that staff felt safer, and better able to be open and be honest in challenging each other in group situations, whilst in supervision on an individual basis, people felt more inclined to tell the other simply what they wanted to hear. Crucially, the staff team shared a lot of the same values around leadership and supervision. The second appreciative inquiry workshop began by developing actions and planning around these developments.

Following this, in the first shared learning day the staff of Nether Johnstone House were introduced to the other two organisations participating in the project. This session developed into an action learning set. Each member group was asked to bring a question and use the other participants to find an answer. The question Nether Johnstone House asked was, "How do we encourage meaningful ownership of, and participation in, a group supervision model?"

The recommendation that came out of the session was to set up a small working group of key influencers amongst the organisation's staff. Group members were chosen on the basis of formal or informal power, and they agreed to explore group supervision in other organisations where it worked

well. However, external organisations were slow to offer insight, particularly with the research period happening over the Festive break.

By the end of January, when the management team met again with Iriss and the SSSC, a consensus had emerged that the organisation was already using a group supervision format successfully, known as the practice highlight. During this practice highlight, which happened at the end of a shift, staff were invited to reflect on the positive and negative things that had occurred. It had begun following the initial consultation to encourage staff to give each other more feedback.

The question was then raised, could the application of a more definite reflective approach refine this fairly unstructured review into what the organisation was looking for... a group supervision that could enhance continuing one-to-one sessions.

The organisation is now set to launch a second consultation. The practice highlight will be audited as it is currently organised to address how it could become a complete reflective cycle, emphasising not only feedback but also how that feedback might change and develop practice. With a more secure structure and focus behind these sessions, this may develop into a peer-led group supervision that is satisfactory in itself, or it may be a staging post along the way to a more authoritative, externally facilitated model.

Now, instead of bringing in absolutely everything for the benefit of outside organisations, there is a focus on developing one single initiative to meet the needs of Nether Johnstone House, whilst supplying the required evidence for inspection. The process undertaken with Iriss and the SSSC has developed a deeper understanding of supervision and has initiated a real cultural and practical turning point for the organisation.

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