

Relationships Matter

Facilitating conversations in a team:
A facilitator's perspective

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ABOUT THE TEAM MEETING

Crannoch is a large detached house in Lochgelly which supports young people between the ages of 8 and 18 years who are unable to stay at home. The manager of Crannoch Care asked Laura Urquhart, a social work student, to use the Relationships Matter tool with residential staff. Staff at Crannoch Care work back-to-back 24.5 hour shifts, with three staff working each shift and six present during handovers. Over a one week period Laura engaged with small groups of staff when they were together and had time to discuss their answers.

USING THE TOOL

The tool was used to (a) open up conversations between Laura and practitioners about how each person's perceptions of their relationship boundaries differ and may impact on the team and quality of organisational practice; and (b) to discuss what the staff team thought about the approach Crannoch Care has on continuing care, for example, whether each person agreed with this approach and what if anything could be done to improve it.

Laura purposefully chose questions that she thought would create debate about practitioners different relationship boundaries and unconscious aspects of people's practice. For example, questions about meeting young people outside of working hours and whether giving young people gifts or borrowing items, were thought to be okay.

She described the use of the tool to staff as 'a test' so that feedback could be provided about the impact of the tool. She could also collect ideas from staff which would encourage and enable them to have more contact with young people who have left Crannoch. These views were then shared with the service manager.

1 What did you hope the outcomes of using this tool would be?

'The hope for the meeting was that everyone would engage in discussion, learn more about the boundaries each person has when working with young people, identify commonalities and differences in relation to these boundaries, and facilitate the building of relationships in the team. By engaging in this discussion we hoped that by becoming aware of other people's viewpoints and approaches to relationships with young people that this may aid reflections, which may in turn improve people's practice.'

2 Were these outcomes achieved?

'Yes. Although people had different views about the boundaries they have and work between - everyone shared their views and said why they thought and felt the way they did. Some interesting discussions emerged as a result of the questions the tool offered and we developed ideas about how to improve communication with young people who have moved on using Facebook.'

Laura believes that some staff initially provided the answers that they thought they should share. She had to prompt them to reflect on whether their answer was evidenced by their practice. For example, the question about whether staff had 'a favourite' was initially met with resistance, yet, it is clear that some staff have a better connection with some young people over others. It was, therefore, discussed that this is to be expected as people naturally gel with some people more than others. Some staff also said that they would not accept gifts from young people until they were reminded that Secret Santa takes place each year and handmade objects would always be welcomed if they were offered. This led to a conversation about how people naturally share things with one another, which is an unconscious part of the culture at Crannoch. So the tool in this setting raised people's awareness of their practice and of others.

Laura noted that, with facilitation, the questions prompted some people to think about how they may react if the scenarios to the questions highlighted became a reality. For example, the question of how to react if a young person turned up at a practitioner's home was one which was thought to be possible. Practitioners ended up discussing if they would invite them inside, and if they did, whether they would engage with them in their home the same way they do when they are at work. So possibilities were projected and discussed and past experiences reflected on.

3 What, if anything, did you learn by using this tool?

'I learned everyone works differently with young people and this does not mean any one approach is wrong, just each worker uses their strengths to best enable their approach. I also learned that everyone has different boundaries in relationships, and again this does not mean that some workers are too personal with young people, it just means they have a different professional relationship with the young people they are working with.'

4 What needs to happen to enable what you have learned to become part of your practice?

'To enable what I have learned to become part of practice would involve sharing my thoughts and ideas with the manager.'

- 5 What needs to happen so you can be better supported to practice this way?

As Laura has shared the staffs needs and ideas at a supervisory meeting, the service manager is now considering how to develop a policy that gives staff a clearer understanding of ways to keep in contact with young people when they have moved on.

While Laura describes the culture at Crannoch as being open to new ideas and the development of the organisation and personal practice, it was felt by staff that a policy would make them feel more confident about continuing to keep in touch with young people after they have moved on.

- 6 What actions, if any, have you, your team or your organisation taken to support and enable you to work this way?

'We are trying to develop a page on social media to encourage young people who have moved on to keep in touch with us. Although social media tends to be frowned upon, we recognise this is the forum many young people favour for communicating.'

Laura has been asked to liaise with other residential units to learn if and how they are using Facebook to keep in contact with young people. There is a desire to use this method at Crannoch, but a need to know how to implement this approach.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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For more on the Relationships Matter conversation tool, please see: <http://s.iriss.org.uk/2e9flwZ>



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