

Practicalities and Possibilities

Person centred planning with older people



Karl

This is the story of Karl from Leicester. Karl lives in a one bedroom flat on a Leicester council estate. He is 68 years old. Karl has some short term memory problems which, by his own admission are partly related to alcohol use.

Karl understands that his memory is poor which he says “annoys and frustrates him as it means he is not as capable as he used to be.”

When asked about what is important in life, Karl says that “love and caring” are the most important things. He loves talking about the past, especially of the time in the late 60s and early 70s, when he was working as a club singer around the pubs and clubs of Leicester. He says proudly that at this time, he was “the highest paid club singer in Leicester.”

Karl describes himself as a “Scottish Cockney from Norway”. His father was Norwegian and mother Scottish. Karl has been married twice and has five children. He spent much of his working life travelling around the country as a carpenter as well as singing. He regrets not seeing his children now due to his drinking but blames himself for this. He feels that working as a club singer led to him drinking a lot as he would “never go on stage unless a glass of sherry was provided”.

The Day Centre

Karl began attending Martin House Day Centre in early 2007. He was referred by his social worker who was concerned that Karl was getting lonely and was not eating properly.

Karl was keen to meet other people, have a decent meal and enjoy a conversation with others. When he first started attending the centre, he was sometimes quite outspoken and this posed a challenge to staff. He also tried to help others with the best of intentions but did not always recognise that this was not always appropriate.

Starting with Appreciations

To help to address this we decided to use the Appreciations tool by working alongside Karl and focusing on his positive qualities, sharing this with other staff.

The interesting thing that came up in using the Appreciations tool was that Karl’s honesty; saying what he thinks, being a good talker and not suffering fools gladly, ended up being seen as positive qualities by staff spending time with him and trying to understand why he thought like he did. Previously, these aspects of his personality were seen as challenging to the service by some staff. Karl’s gifts; singing, quizzes and being kind and helpful to other service users were also identified by staff working alongside Karl. Ron, one member of staff initially did this work and shared it with other staff who then began to see him in a much more positive light. This way of working was quite different in that we managed to get away from seeing a service user as a mass of symptomatic problems and challenges, which can happen when the person is just seen as how they initially present, and staff got to know the real person behind all this.

We also used the Good Days and Bad Days tool in order to understand how we could make Karl's day better and empathise with his situation.

What changed?

As a result of this work, Karl began to settle in at the centre much better. He could see that staff were taking the time to try to understand him and what motivated him. As a result, a day care placement, that was at risk of breaking down, has now led to increased days of attendance for Karl.

Karl says he feels appreciated at Martin House. He says he "loves it". He says he finds it "very helpful" when staff spend the time chatting to him about his life and how they can support him. He particularly appreciates having a hot meal freshly prepared at the day care as he does not get this at home. He also says he thrives on the company. He now understands there are rules at the centre and he has met staff half way in terms of how he and staff understand each other.

He is now settled at day care, staff are accepting of his right to be there, and staff have gained a greater appreciation of the need not to make assumptions about service users due to how they may initially seem, and the importance of finding out what makes someone tick. This then has led to greater empathy of the people who use the service; not just Karl. It has led to a revision of our standard day service care plan to make it far more person centred, less jargonistic and more focused on what service users can do than what they cannot.

What we like and admire about Karl

- Honesty.
- Doesn't suffer fools lightly.
- Says what he thinks.
- Gets involved.
- Good talker.
- Works hard to fit in and be part of the centre.



Karl's gifts

- Good singer.
- Good at quizzes.
- Kind.
- Helpful.

What makes a good day for Karl?

- Meeting genuine people.
- Reading, Karl uses the library at Beaumont Leys.
- Doing crosswords.
- When the sun shines.
- Coming to Martin House where people are friendly and Karl can enjoy a good meal.
- Having clean clothes to wear, as physically and mentally he feels much better in himself.

What makes a bad day for Karl

- Not having a cigarette.
- If the weather is cold and damp.
- If someone picks on him for how he looks.
- If someone lies to him.

