

# Personalisation through person centred thinking with older people

**Helen Sanderson, Gill Bailey and Helen Bowers show how working in person-centred ways and adopting person-centred thinking skills and tools can make a real difference to older people's support and their lives.**

George, 69, is fun-loving and has a great sense of humour. He lives alone in a bungalow and doesn't have contact with his family. He uses a wheelchair and has difficulties maintaining personal care and the hygiene of his home. He couldn't sleep in his bed because he couldn't get to it and he didn't have any clothes, meaning he couldn't get dressed. Even though he had a social worker, housing officer, district nurse and carers in his life, they were generally unable to go into his home because of the risk to their own health. His health and home deteriorated, and he was at risk of being evicted.

George's social worker Liz decided a person centred approach might benefit him, so she used the person-centred tool Histories to find out his interests and views about his situation. It was clear he wasn't happy as he was. Liz worked with his carers on an Appreciations tool to help them see what people like and admire about George, and to understand the situation from his perspective. Liz then started working to develop a one page profile that looked at what was working and

not working in George's life and how best to support him.

Now, as well physical changes being made to his home environment, the support George receives from his carers has changed too – from visits at specific times of the day, to a block of 20 hours which can be used more creatively. George feels less agitated and happier in himself; sleeps much better in his own bed instead of his wheelchair; and his home and hygiene have been transformed. He has also achieved something he has wanted for a long time - he owns a new dog.

Older people keep telling us that the keys to a good life are having meaningful relationships, self esteem, control over care and support that is personalised to their needs, a home and a meaningful role in community life. And of course, these aspirations are reflected in the vision of Putting People First and the current work underway to transform adult social care.

There's an increasing emphasis on self directed support and personalisation

across all public services, and the lessons learnt from various pilots like POPPs, Individual Budgets and Link Age Plus are informing new ways of working. However, there are still those who have voiced their concerns about the barriers faced in making personalised approaches work well for older people. The Practicalities and Possibilities Development Programme tackles this issue and has been running in nine local authorities over the past 18 months.

Practicalities and Possibilities was developed by the Older People's Programme, the Centre for Policy on Ageing and Helen Sanderson Associates, to help councils and their NHS partners work together to improve the outcomes for older people using a range of person-centred techniques.

A resource pack containing lessons and stories from the programme shows how Bournemouth, Buckinghamshire, Cheshire, Cumbria, Dorset, Enfield, Hounslow, Leicester and Tameside are innovatively improving the performance of different services by bringing people, teams and agencies together more efficiently.

Each area created a personalised approach by using different person centred tools to learn who the older person is, what is important to them from their perspective and how they want to be supported. This helps combat the tendency to see the older person as a set of needs or problems to be sorted out. Teams also developed Communication Charts and Decision

Making Agreements as a way of ensuring the older person has choice and control in their life when they need a lot of support, for example if someone develops dementia.

Person Centred Reviews can show what works and doesn't work from the perspectives of the older person, their family, friends and supporters. This can ensure one page profiles make a real difference to people because they can be reviewed both informally and as part of a statutory process. The information from reviews can be aggregated and used to inform service change and commissioning, which has been set out in the recently launched Department of Health guidance Working Together for Change (2009) co-authored by Helen Sanderson. Understanding the older persons wishes, and their story or history are often the crucial first steps that anyone can take to personalise the services they deliver.

Through each local authority's work, we found there were a number of lessons for helping older people experience the benefits of personalisation.

## **Involve older people from the start - individually and collectively - to identify key priorities**

For example, a small residential care home in Tameside - Oakwood House - is home to 18 older people. They began by asking each person living there to share what was important to them, and how they wanted to be supported at

supper times. The managers then asked whether those things were present or absent, by looking at what was working and not working. This information was used to identify what needed to change in the home's routines. One example was Winnie, who at 104 had a tot of whisky in her tea and a Wagon Wheel at suppertime – a great improvement on the plain biscuit and tea previously on offer. The managers then worked to extend the range of snacks at suppertime based on what they learned people would like. Those people who wished to were supported to prepare their own snacks.

## **Partnerships underpin success**

By seeking out partnerships, organisations can link local and 'agency-specific' developments to other, wider agendas. Cheshire held a two-day event with local providers, older people's forums, voluntary agencies and in house teams to develop a shared understanding and awareness of person centred thinking and the tools that are available. It meant each organisation could introduce the work into their own practice, embedding person centred approaches across the whole system of services, sectors and support.

## **A strategic approach is essential with support from a senior influential and committed local lead**

Identify a small number of priorities that have been agreed by your partners, which should always include older

people. In Buckinghamshire, the Service Development Manager for Person Centred Planning was key in securing the funding. They obtained support from the Head of Adult Social Care and a large independent provider supporting the largest number of older people in the area. Together, they piloted person centred approaches in a couple of care homes, rather than the whole organisation, to see what they could learn initially before rolling out more widely.

## **Invest in creating the right conditions for change**

Recognise that cultural shifts and attitudinal change takes time. This is not simply an introduction of tools, new processes, forms or systems. In Hounslow, they recognise that there is no quick fix, but the team have noticed that communication has improved between the partners, with more discussions about how to adopt person centred approaches and what that might mean practically.

## **Recognise that this is not just a change for staff, but for older people and families as well**

A residential care home in Dorset consulted with residents and staff about which person centred tools to use. They liked the Important To and Important For tool because they felt it was easy, with a simple layout that quickly identifies the meaningful things in their lives. One of the unexpected benefits of this approach was the stronger

relationships that developed between staff and families who could understand each other better. Families saw that staff members were committed to providing high quality and personalised support for each person, which increased families' confidence and trust.

## Finally, take a problem solving approach at every level

Just start and learn from doing. Celebrate and sustain what works, and address what does not work. When Buckinghamshire reflected on what they had tried, they realised that involving older people from the beginning would

lead to a different focus for their work. However, their training days with nursing and direct support staff went really well, and those groups of people can now see the relevance and usefulness of person centred thinking in helping to personalise the experiences of older people.

To follow the progress of Oakwood House in continuing to use person centred thinking tools, please see their blog on [www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk](http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk)

The practicalities and Possibilities resource pack is available from [www.practicalitiesandpossibilities.com](http://www.practicalitiesandpossibilities.com)

