

Our Methods of Work Publication and Seminars

How do Connection Workers Work With Clients?

We decided that we would define and develop our way of working. We did this in consultation with service users and staff. This "Methods of Work" project led to a document which was distributed to key stakeholders and was the subject of seminars involving service users and partnership agencies across Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. The following is a summary of this work.

Our Relationship with Our Clients

We believe the client is the key person in defining their own needs and as someone with the potential for increased independence over time. The relationship we develop with our clients involves the following:

- **Listening and trust**
- **Problem solving:** We support our clients in working out how to make the best decisions for them. We help them put these decisions into practice.
- **Emotional support:** Listening and supporting our clients in a professional way frequently allows our clients to positively change their behaviour towards themselves and others.
- **Respect:** We respect our clients as individuals and their right to control their own home and make their own choices.
- **Assertiveness and persistence:** Although we always respect our clients, we will challenge if we feel this is necessary to help a client achieve their goal of independence.
- **Boundaries and clear expectations:** In order to ensure the working relationship is helpful, effective and safe for both client and caseworker, we work with our clients to have agreed ground rules about the working relationship.
- **Helping change behaviours which cause difficulty to clients or others:** Talking and thinking about these can help a client start to break patterns of behaviour that puts either their housing in jeopardy or contributes to making them homeless. We are honest with our clients in that whilst we always seek to work in partnership with our clients, very occasionally, if we feel the client is a serious risk to themselves or to another, public protection issues may require us to breach confidentiality.

One-to-One Work: Promoting Independence

This can be described as a three stage process:

Doing "for":

In the early stages of our work with our clients we will sometimes offer to do things on behalf of our client often in order to alleviate and stabilise an immediate presenting crisis. This might include the following: finding out about and accessing possible housing; writing letters to debtors to request the writing-off of debts; applying for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or grants.

Doing "with":

Now the immediate crisis is over, we do "with" rather than "for". We share responsibilities for tasks with the client and work together to achieve agreed goals which will help the client become more independent. One of our strengths is that we work holistically (with the whole person) to help them deal with these problems including getting them in touch with other organisations, confidence-building, meeting people, applying for and attending educational courses, and finding work.

Promoting and sustaining independence: Our final goal which means our regular support is no longer needed. However, the door is left open for further contact should our client need further support.

The Frequency and Level of Support

We encourage clients to **define their needs** and, where possible, **put them in charge** of their programme of support. We **respond** to what is happening in the client's life. The number and length of meetings between the caseworker and the client **depends entirely** upon the specific **needs of the client** and the **stage** that the working relationship has reached.

Therefore we describe our service as **flexible** or **floating in intensity**. We can change the level of support when there is a change in the level of need. This requires both the client and the caseworker to **communicate** with each other and be **reliable**. There is also a **regular 6 month support plan** and **review** process which helps to make sure this is working well.

Use of phone cover

We are available for telephone support between 9.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday (except bank holidays). We do not provide a 24 hour telephone service as we work mainly in office hours. This is when we are most able to sort things out, as other services are also open. However, we plan with our clients about how to cope with crisis as an essential part of moving towards their independence.

Work Outside One-To-One Meetings

We work closely and "connect" our clients with **other agencies** in order to help them receive the best support possible. We sometimes act as "care managers", co-ordinating support between different agencies and being the main point of contact for a client.

A big part of our role is to help other agencies understand the client's perspective and vice versa in order ensure that rights are met and that agencies take their responsibilities seriously.

An important and significant amount of time is spent on following up important tasks on behalf of our client. It is essential that this non-contact time is acknowledged by funding agencies.