NDTi insights

22

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Social work in a social enterprise –

The experience of People2People

Who should read this?

This paper will be of interest to social workers, team managers, local authority managers, professional development leads, commissioners and citizen leaders. It will also be of interest to those directing and influencing adult social care strategy at a local level – advocacy services, directors of adult social care and elected members.

Background

The Care Act provides an opportunity to consider alternatives to local authority managed social work provision and to learn from the experiences of the DH Adult Social Work Practice Pilot. One of those practices, People2People, has been in existence for over 2.5 years and now delivers all community based social work in Shropshire. People2People was established by Shropshire Council and the partnership nature of the arrangement that still exists is key to its continued success and growth.

Purpose of Report

This report was produced to provide an overview of the learning from People2People in order to shape thinking about alternative approaches to social work provision. We think it is important that this thinking focuses on ownership by local people, social workers and local authorities.

Plain English summary

In the Care Act the government says that many of the things that social workers do could be done outside local councils. This means that the local council is still responsible but social workers could set up their own organisations. There has been a national pilot to set up adult social work practices. One of these pilots, People2People in Shropshire, has found that being outside the local council has many advantages for local people, social workers and the local council. A partnership between these three is an important key to its success.

Main findings

The model and approach on which People2People is based has delivered significant benefits in Shropshire in terms of improved outcomes, reduced use of more traditional services, reduced bureaucracy, more streamlined processes, delegated decision making with accountability and a more motivated and empowered workforce. In addition there is a strong sense of community engagement and local ownership of the venture.

How has this been achieved is complex but relates to a number of key factors:

- A structure that positioned social work in the community, accountable to local people who are involved formally and informally at a day to day practice and board level.

- A working culture that has embedded person centred thinking and is focused on the person's assets and strengths, building independence and self-reliance.

- An arrangement that operates as a staff mutual whereby practitioners influence and shape their team practices as well as having representation on the board of directors. This has created a much stronger sense of ownership, commitment and motivation on the part of team members.

- Local people with experience of using social care being involved as equal members of the team and working as volunteer peer supporters

to provide invaluable information, support and advice to help people think through their own situation and what will work for them

- Strengthening professional integrity, making professional development a priority and providing opportunities for continued learning. Using qualified practitioners where they are most needed, supporting and respecting their professional judgement.

- A strong partnership between the organisation and the local council to continually steer, develop and refine the model for maximum benefit and to make the most of opportunities presented.

- A local presence – recognising that social work needs to be released from council buildings and have a much stronger presence in the community, using town halls and community centres, etc. and working in partnership with sheltered housing providers, GP surgeries, etc.

Conclusions and key messages

The experience of People2People continues to provide a great deal of learning about how the role of the social worker can be strengthened and some of the advantages of having an independent practice which they are involved in shaping:

- Not being seen as part of the local council changes the relationship with local people and other organisations; there are different expectations and a different dynamic that is positive and focuses on possibilities.

- Working in person centred ways is what most social workers have been striving to do despite systems and procedures that can hinder this. The opportunities to question and redesign processes and systems are experienced in an independent practice much more powerfully and there is a greater sense of ownership and continual striving for improvement.

- Being more closely connected to communities generates opportunities for connections with local groups and organisations that mean that considering community solutions to achieve outcomes for people is more naturally the default option.

- Peer supporters working alongside practitioners is a powerful combination to achieve best support for a person and raises people's aspirations and expectations about what they can achieve as well as strengthening informal networks of support.