

# Practicalities and Possibilities

Person centred planning with older people



## Marion

Marion lives alone in a bungalow next to a school, on a medium-sized estate in Leicester. She is eighty years old. Marion's appearance is very important to her. She has told us that she was once a beauty queen, and with her still-slim figure, high cheekbones and thick wavy hair, it is easy to imagine how she won her crown. Marion likes to dress well; she is always beautifully co-ordinated and often wears lilac floral outfits. It is important to Marion that she looks nice for her visits to the Day Centre, where we first met her several years ago and where she continues to attend three days a week. Marion also likes her home to be kept clean and tidy 'as you never know who might call in.' A home carer visits her several times a week.

Marion began coming to the Day Centre after a short period at a Day Hospital. Living on her own, she was becoming increasingly overwhelmed by feelings of anxiety, especially about her finances, and she was becoming more and more worried about her inability to remember things. These issues continue on occasion to trouble Marion. Although she does have supportive family members living in and around Leicester who regularly visit her, Marion says that she knows they also have their own lives to lead. She would like people who visit her at home to have more time to spend just chatting with her but she feels that as she has 'got better' then they do not spend so much time with her!

One of the most striking things that comes over when listening to Marion is that although she often comes to the Day Centre not feeling good about herself or her life, she quickly becomes much more positive when someone just gives her a little bit of their time to listen and chat with her. This suggested to us that with the right approach at the right time, workers could help Marion more to counteract her negative feelings about herself and her situation. We could then tap into Marion's optimistic, outgoing side. Person centred thinking and planning offered pointers as to what would help Marion make the most out of her time at the Day Centre and generally improve her self-esteem.

Marion says "Life is not as good as it used to be but I live in the hope that it will get better."

### Learning about Good Days and Bad Days for Marion

We started by using the person centred thinking tool Good Days and Bad Days with Marion. Ron, one of the Day Centre workers who is especially well liked by Marion, introduced this to her and she very readily came up with some ideas.

Not surprisingly, all the things that make a good day for Marion involve being in the company of other people. When we look at what Marion has listed, we see the everyday contacts, such as having a meal with others, or getting a hug from friends, which many of us take for granted. However, for an older person living on their own and feeling isolated and sometimes even unwanted, this contact can mean a great deal. On a bad day, all Marion's worries about her money, her memory and her loneliness overwhelm her.

## What makes a good day for Marion

- Having someone to talk to first thing in the morning when she is having breakfast.
- Meeting friends at the Day Centre and getting a gentle hug.
- Having a meal with other people.
- Having a singsong after lunch.
- If her friends are in a positive mood, then Marion feels cheerful.

## What makes a bad day for Marion

- If she feels confused when she gets up in the morning.
- If she feels someone has taken her money.
- If she wants a cigarette and cannot have one.

We learned from this that Marion often feels that her day has got off to a bad start, but it can often be 'saved' if we respond quickly and sensitively to her.

As well as using person centred thinking with Marion, Ron was able to talk to the rest of the team about how Person centred thinking could help Marion make the most of the time she spent at the Day Centre. She is now less likely to get overwhelmed by her worries and more able to enjoy her day out in the company of others. Prior to thinking in a more Person centred way, workers often felt helpless in the face of Marion's low moods and tended to see these as inevitable and difficult to respond to.

## Appreciating Marion

The second person centred thinking tool that we used with Marion was 'Appreciations', to enable Marion to see that she is noticed, valued and liked for who she is. Marion laughed and looked rather shy when reading this list over again but she did say: "It is lovely to have those nice things said about me."

## What we like and admire about Marion

- Enjoys a conversation.
- Usually speaks to everyone.
- Has a good sense of humour.
- Enjoys a laugh.
- Enjoys a practical joke.
- Thoughtful.
- Beautiful.
- Watches out and lets us know if someone is struggling to get around.



## Marion's gifts

- Very kind.
- Helpful.
- Says what she thinks or feels.
- Sings very well.

We are now better at giving Marion the kind of attention and compliments that makes her feel good about herself, some of which were identified in Appreciations. This means she gets more enjoyment from her days out and feels more involved in what is going on around her.

A better understanding of their role in providing the kind of responses Marion herself has told us she needs has had a 'knock-on' effect on the team.

As Ron says: "When I'm getting a good response from Marion it makes me feel as if I'm achieving in my role as a carer."

And as for Marion: "I'm just an ordinary person who wants to share things about my everyday life and plans and have a laugh and a joke."

