

Promoting coaching techniques amongst frontline workers in the homelessness sector

City Literary Institute



Project synopsis

This project has brought together 9 homelessness organisations to develop and deliver a training programme around coaching techniques. 149 frontline staff have been trained and have developed their skills and confidence in using coaching techniques. Training materials have been developed which will be readily available online and disseminated widely across the sector.

Project aims

The aims of the project were to develop and deliver high quality, relevant, sector-led training in coaching techniques. This would enable 150 frontline workers to improve their skills, confidence and technical knowledge so that they would more effectively support their clients to reach their life goals. A training materials pack would be developed that would be available online and disseminated widely through a dissemination event to ensure sustainability beyond the life of the project. The project was ambitious in its aim for the wider homelessness and health and social care sectors to adopt the coaching model as integral to their support work practices with clients.

This project was innovative in its design as it brought together 9 homelessness organisations to work together to develop, deliver and evaluate the training programme for frontline workers that intended to ultimately result in improved outcomes for homeless clients. The training would be delivered jointly with members across the steering group to ensure that they were well positioned to deliver the training within their own organisations once the project had ceased.

Methodology

The evaluation methods used to gather evidence of project outcomes and make judgements on the success of the project were as follows:

- Online survey sent to all training participants (149). We received 15 completed surveys
- Telephone interviews with 4 steering group members, all of which had either attended the training or co-facilitated
- Face to face interview with the project manager
- Desk analysis of steering group minutes and evaluation forms

Project delivery

The project was strategically managed first and foremost through a project steering group. Members attended meetings every two months and used this forum to plan, discuss and exchange ideas around who the training would be for, how staff should benefit, who would deliver it and how best to market it. The steering group reviewed the success of the training throughout the project and agreed modifications along the way. This process led to the production of extra case studies, films and teaching tools. A key feature of the steering group was that five members co-facilitated some of the training sessions. They first attended the training as participants and worked with the facilitator before co-facilitating themselves.

49% of project participants rated the course excellent, 46% rated it good and 5% rated it satisfactory. The training received some mixed reviews in the early stages of the project. Changes were made which resulted in improvements and more positive feedback. This was evident from the course evaluation forms. After the first course 100% of participants rated it good. After the last course 91% of participants rated it excellent and 9% good. Some of the comments made by project participants about the training include: knowledgeable trainers, very in-depth, practical, engaging, dynamic, skilled facilitation, time given to practice techniques, good manual to accompany course, the most informative course in a long time, thought provoking, more work could have been done around 'who is coachable', too much role play, too much discussion, repetitive. The project participants valued the fact that the trainers had worked in the homelessness sector themselves and could empathise with the issues frontline workers face. The project has been beneficial in other ways. Participants have found it useful to train together with workers from other organisations across the sector and having the opportunity to share best practice and exchange ideas has been really valued.

In terms of what we would do differently next time, it became apparent through the steering group that it would have been beneficial for more managers to have attended the training so that the frontline staff attending could be better supported in the workplace to implement the new skills learnt, but this would not have been possible given the timescales of the project. The feedback provided by participants early on in the project indicated that the training was too short and that three days rather than two would have been more beneficial. However, it was felt by the steering group that this would have been more difficult to implement. Staff would have needed longer off work and managers would have had to find additional cover and there would be cost implications to this. In order to address this two extended practice days were planned to try and cover some additional learning. Embedding these earlier on in the project would have been beneficial.

The project has run slightly behind schedule as the training materials online toolkit is still in development and will be disseminated at the dissemination event which is also behind schedule and due to be delivered in the new year.

Project outcomes

The project has achieved most of its outcomes. City Lit and its partners; 9 homelessness organisations developed and delivered a training programme in coaching techniques to 149 frontline workers and managers (99% against recruitment target) across 7 organisations within the homelessness sector. The steering group was key in ensuring this success. Members promoted the training throughout their organisations. Each member organisation was allocated a number of places and a deadline to fill them. In addition, steering group members attended the training themselves. They were then more able to promote the training from a better informed position.

As a result of the training, participants have been introduced to and have increased their skills. Staff are drawing on the training, using the new techniques and working in a different way with their clients. The following table identifies the extent to which the project participants feel they have changed their practices:

	Percentage of participants
The training has actively changed participants' thinking	53%
Participants are currently working with the coaching principles	87%
Participants are using the coaching tools	79%
Participants are using active listening	73%
Participants are using effective questioning	73%
Participants feel more able to use a holistic approach	64%
Participants now give more responsibilities to clients compared to before	60%
Participants set goals with clients more effectively	53%
Participants are more able to motivate clients	33%
Participants are more effective at enabling clients to change	40%
Participants use coaching techniques regularly	80%
Participants feel more confident at using the tools learnt	87%
Participants are more skilled at working with clients in a deeper and more constructive way on issues that have repeated negative impact	93%

There has been some impact on clients but the results of the survey indicate that overall most project participants do not feel there has been a great deal of impact on clients.

	Percentage of project participants who agree
There has been some form of change	93%
Clients take more responsibility	53%
Clients are more motivated to change	27%
Clients deal with change more effectively	20%
Clients are less resistant to change	27%
Clients follow through with actions more consistently	27%
Clients set and achieve goals more effectively	20%
Clients are more able to identify areas of their lives they have control over	27%
Clients are more able to confidently deal with setbacks	13%

However, some positive changes have been made, particularly with specific clients. When project participants were asked to provide examples of client progression as a result of using coaching techniques they provided a number of examples. One client has moved onto lower support due to becoming more motivated and taking more responsibility. Some clients have now accessed detox and rehab and two clients have moved onto independent living. It should be noted however that frontline workers are using a number of tools and techniques such as cognitive behavior therapy, motivational interviewing, outcome focused interviewing and careers guidance methodologies. It would be difficult to identify which of these techniques have had the most impact on ensuing change. As a result of its involvement in this project one organisation developed a youth project that is based on the coaching model. Through this project eight clients have got jobs, been housed and are beginning to take responsibility and ownership of their issues. Coupled with befriending, the organisation has also introduced the coaching model into its service for women with multiple and complex needs and has had very positive results. All of the eight women have reduced their offending and sex working, sustained their tenancies and begun treatment for their substance misuse issues.

In terms of the key areas in which clients are dealing better with change, participants identify the following:

Clients deal better with change in terms of:	
using services appropriately	53%
Benefits	40%
Employment	33%
Housing	27%
Education / training	53%

The project has probably been over ambitious in its desire to make institutional changes across the sector. The training does complement some of the existing ways of working, for instance careers advice work and person-centred planning but some of the organisations involved were already using coaching techniques with clients across their organisations. In addition, it is felt that for coaching to be fully embedded, the project would needed to have engaged more fully with senior managers at a strategic level and the training would needed to have been longer than two days as skills need to be built up and reflected upon over time. However, the project had enabled organisations to think more about using coaching as a tool. For instance, one organisation is intending to include coaching in the annual learning needs analysis in order to engage senior managers in discussion around whether coaching should be more engrained in organisational practice.

The project has the potential to be fully sustainable beyond the end of the project. One organisation has already made changes to its working practices that support clients by incorporating coaching into keyworking, planning and review sessions. Once the training materials toolkit is online it will be available to organisations across the sector to use within their existing core training programmes. By some steering group members co-facilitating some of the training they are better positioned to be able to deliver the training themselves as they have already experienced using the lesson plans and training materials and have been involved in their development. Most steering group member organisations have said that they will make use of the training materials once they are available.

The coaching model is currently being incorporated into Camden and Islington's Big Lottery Fund bid for Fulfilling Lives: Multiple and Complex Needs funding, which could result in the coaching model being rolled out across these two boroughs over at least 5 years if the bid is successful. This is as a direct result of one organisation's involvement in this project.

City Lit has benefited greatly from the project. It has strengthened the partnerships with the organisations involved and increased our potential for further joint working in the future. This has already resulted in a new pilot project that is currently being delivered.

Sharing of project findings

In the new year a dissemination event will be delivered and it is at this that the training materials online toolkit will be launched and promoted. The toolkit will be hosted by City Lit's website and promoted through Homeless Link which has a membership of over 500 homeless organisations across England. This will encourage other homeless organisations to engage more with coaching as a technique to use to improve the outcomes for homeless people