

Complex Needs - A worker's view

We spoke with a Navigator, a Peer Mentor and the Team Leader in the Leeds WY-FI team and discussed how complex needs are worked with and managed by the team.

David Healy - A WY-FI Navigator



David has been a WY-FI Navigator since March 2016. We asked him to talk about his role, describing his approach generally but also relating it to Beneficiaries who came to mind during our chat.

Taking the time

From the very first meeting with Beneficiaries, time is often one of the most important factors.

David recalled one relationship which ended up being very successful after a "rather frosty" beginning. "It takes time to build trust, and during that time Beneficiaries will sometimes test me," he says with a smile, "to see if I'm the real deal".

Lived experience

David's personal background includes lived experience of some of the HARM areas and he draws upon this as part of his way of working and forming relationships with Beneficiaries. He believes passionately in looking beyond someone's behaviour or their past, and instead sees the person. He realises that this is not something that everyone is able to do easily.

David recalls his own past experiences of "feeling judged and written off".

David doesn't want other people to have the same experiences as he did. He says "when I'm working with Beneficiaries it's important to keep reminding them that they have as much right to services as anyone else. This

matters because that's often not how they've been treated in the past".

We spoke about the balance between personal lived experience and professional skills. David is certain that it's the unique mix of these two things that makes WY-FI Navigators different from some other workers.

Shared learning

David says that though "having life experience is really useful, it's not always the answer to everything". For example David says that when advocating on behalf of Beneficiaries it's sometimes necessary to challenge services and systems. But one thing he's learned is that "before you walk in and start challenging services it's really important to understand how they function and why".

Since starting with the team, David has learned to use his contacts within services to broaden his professional network and discover new organisations and projects to better support his Beneficiaries.

"It's always useful to find out what other services are doing and who they're linking up with – we all share our contacts and knowledge."

The local Practice Development Groups (PDGs) and Multi-Agency Review Boards (MARBs) are often good places to share knowledge and learning. They also enable people to work together to find solutions to situations which a single worker may not come up with on their own.

The reflective aspects of the PDGs are also useful for Navigators. Within the role there is often a tricky balance to make between being optimistic with a beneficiary and managing expectations. If things don't go according to plan, David says that as a worker it's important to not let any frustration show too openly. This is where the BARCA Leeds team offer each other support and advice, sometimes officially, sometimes unofficially. And it's also where the PDGs and MARBs have a role to play.

Peer Mentor

The following interview is with Louise, a Peer Mentor with the Leeds WY-FI team

What are the benefits of peer mentoring for you?

It keeps me focused and is something to get my teeth into. It gives me more drive to work in this area and get a full time job. I'm learning all the time as I've not done this before.

How do Peer Mentors help Navigators and Beneficiaries?

More experience is better when working with Beneficiaries so with a Peer Mentor and Navigator there may be two different approaches and one way might work better for that particular beneficiary.

Once Peer Mentors are able to lone work it also relieves stress from the Navigator. Lone working also gives Peer Mentors independence too which is nice to have.

What approach do you use with Beneficiaries?

The lived experience is the most beneficial part. The Beneficiaries don't see you as authoritative and it's a good way in with them.

What is the best thing about your role?

It's a nice feeling to be out there helping people. It's also great from a beneficiary's point of view as it's good for them to see how you can turn things around.

Other thoughts...

The work can be stressful but the positive office environment helps – the team dynamics are light-hearted and even though I'm a volunteer I feel like a valued member of the team. The training is really valuable too, not just the initial Peer Mentor course which is accredited, but also the WY-FI training programme for front line workers which covers topics like 'working with personality disorders'.

Managing a team of complex needs workers...

We spoke to Richard Foster (Foz) who is the Team Leader for the Leeds WY-FI Team

From a manager's point of view, what are the difficulties in regards to working with complex needs?

As a manager I feel it's my responsibility to take pressure off the staff during supervisions by asking how their work lives are and by ensuring they are focused on the job in hand and not allowing it to take over.

How is lived experience managed?

Lived experience is managed differently. However, you have to be careful not to give those with lived experience their own policy. Essentially they are paid members of staff like everyone else and there are certain expectations that come with that. You do have to take into account however that they may have meetings that would aid their sustained recovery and may have appointments that are important to attend. This may be within work hours so it's about being honest and communicating with the manager. It's important to remember that this may also be the case for someone without lived experience as they may also have things that trigger a change in mood.



What approach do you use, both with Beneficiaries and staff?

The Navigators are the ones who work with the Beneficiaries so with staff I take a motivational approach and try to give them the opportunity to find their own answers. I am there to run ideas by but it's up to them, given their past and what they have been through, to come up with the solutions to the often chaotic problems that present.

What advice can you give to those looking at working with complex needs criteria?

You need to be resilient, have good problem solving skills, be thick skinned and ideally have a car. It's important to understand that there isn't a timescale with working with people and success has to be measured differently for each person, for example success might be actually getting them to answer the door to you or even communicating with you at all. Above all resilience is the key skill needed for an employee or a service working with complex needs.