

My Life as a Social Inclusion Worker

by Paul Tyler

Social Inclusion

'Social Inclusion' have been key words for the last few years and have been the basis for promoting change at a high level, but what does Social Inclusion actually mean at grass roots level?

My name is Paul Tyler and I have worked for Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust for 10 years, the last 4 years as a Social Inclusion Worker. What follows are some examples of the work that I do alongside two colleagues within the Recovery service. None of it is rocket science, it is common sense and, hopefully, will help to recognise basic rights that society often takes for granted.

The most important person in the work that we do is the individual, who, for whatever reason, feels/is excluded from society. Initially, I will spend time with an individual, explaining how I can help, what he/she can expect from me and hopefully build up a level of trust and respect. I always treat others as I would expect to be treated, which helps to build trust and mutual respect. During this time people are encouraged to complete a Social Inclusion Questionnaire, which helps to identify needs in areas of a person's life, including education, employment, leisure and housing. This also helps the individual to identify the most important thing to him/her at that time and gives me the starting point for my work. An example of this is an individual who said what he really wanted to do was go abseiling. One week later he went abseiling, and then he opened up about his hopes for the future, how he needed help with his housing situation and would like to look at employment opportunities and how his finances needed attention. I and the staff at the Recovery unit were then able to work with him to sort out his housing and finances. I then

referred him to an employment placement service who were able to use their skills to help with the employment. One of the things I get asked about the abseiling is 'What about the insurance and the risk?' As far as I was concerned, we used a reputable outdoors adventure company to facilitate the training and checked that they had indemnity insurance. At the end of the day, it was a member of the public accessing an activity in the same way as anyone else would.

When looking to meet needs, the aim is always for access to mainstream opportunities; however, this is not always possible initially. Some people have been excluded for a number of years and it would not be fair to send someone off to college or a work placement in an environment he/she was not comfortable with. One of the ways we tackle this is through stepping stones towards mainstream. Currently, we run various courses in partnership with Cornwall College, including Horticulture and Art courses at the Eden Project and basic skills courses at Selwood House

(Recovery unit). The horticulture course is now into its fourth year and is available to anyone who applies as a volunteer at the Eden Project, but the majority come from the mental health services. This course has led to some students enrolling on mainstream courses, others volunteering at Eden outside of the college times and, recently, an individual gaining enough confidence to apply for and obtain employment with a support provider. The basic skills course at Selwood has recently started and already I can see an increase in motivation, self-esteem and confidence. Hopefully, this will lead to people attending mainstream opportunities as the barriers to learning start to reduce.

These opportunities have come about through myself and my colleagues being given the time to build links and network with other organisations. We facilitate quarterly network meetings (Whole Life Community groups), which give organisations the opportunity to share ideas and good practice, and also the opportunity to work together on projects that will help to meet the needs of individuals. As a mental health specialist provider, we are not a housing expert or a leisure expert or an employment placement adviser, so we need to utilise the expertise that is available in the community as anyone else would. We will not raise awareness and promote inclusion for individuals unless we work in partnership.

Social inclusion is the responsibility of the whole community and will not be attained or maintained without the involvement of the whole community. Myself and my colleagues have made a start in Cornwall and it is making a difference to the lives of individuals, but there is a lot more to do.

