

Overview

As part of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council's (MBC) learning and development strategy to support employees in their Adult Social Care settings they required a training provider to facilitate training interventions in a range of development areas. These were: having Difficult Conversations, Strengths Based Assessment and Outcome-focussed Care Planning and Supervision skills training. They needed to train 175 social workers within the social work, mental health and safeguarding teams. They required the trainers to be qualified and experienced with a background of expertise in these areas who would empower their employees, increase awareness, knowledge and skills in the subject areas.

The Solution

Talking Life was awarded at formal tender the Adults' Social Skills Work Training programme contract for Sandwell MBC.

Upon contract award our contracts manager, Jonathan Kerr met with the contracts manager and principal social worker at Sandwell MBC together with our 2 trainers for this project, to discuss and finalise the course content of each topic. Once the course content was finalised, the course materials were sent to Sandwell MBC for final sign off. The course for 'Difficult Conversations' evolved during this meeting and it was decided between Sandwell and the trainer that the course that they actually wanted delivered was having 'different' conversations as opposed to difficult conversations. The course was adapted by the trainer and then written bespoke for Sandwell service users.

Managed Service

Talking Life managed the contract from start to finish, and appointed a dedicated contracts manager and event co-coordinator in order to oversee the smooth running of the programme and liaison with Sandwell MBC's commissioning team. This involved organising suitable dates and venues, collating feedback forms, together with attendance lists for the training sessions and putting all reference documents and hand-outs on the Talking Life website so they were easily accessible to delegates pre and post training. We held regular mid contract review meetings to ensure continued quality and assessment of the training. We also completed a post contract delivery review meeting with Sandwell MBC to check that all learning outcomes had been fully accomplished.

Delivery

The content of the sessions was discussed and finalised at a pre delivery meeting at Sandwell MBC with our Contracts manager together with both trainers.

The content that was delivered was as follows:-

1. Having Different Conversations with Service Users

In the context of the Care Act, it's important to empower staff with the skills and knowledge to be able to have various types of difficult or challenging conversations with service users. These conversations are based on the needs and circumstances of the clients, whether they are at risk and crisis, whether they need to connect with things that can help them to progress their lives or whether they need help with support planning and budgets.

By the end of this one day programme, delegates would have:

- Thought about difficult conversations and the skills you already possess
- Learnt about the preparation that will support them and motivation techniques
- Identified key communication skills
- Tried out the skills and received constructive feedback
- Thought about the follow-up

2. Strength -based assessment and outcome- focussed care plan training

The strengths or asset based approach, which is mandated in the Care Act, is about focusing on what a person can do, rather than what they cannot do; it is a move away from considering needs to explore and maximise the person's skills, relationships and resources. Engaging with the person at the centre, the practitioner's role is to support that person to make the best decisions for themselves. It involves mapping what is available in the community and tapping into universal services to find what is right for the person.

The Care Act also highlights the importance of an individual defining their own personal outcomes related to what is important to them. These are distinct from eligibility outcomes defined under the Act.

This one day course looked at how the subject of supporting a person to define and record their outcomes during an assessment is done and how to adopt the strengths based approach by changing the questions asked. Examples and case studies from other authorities were presented, using materials from the Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE). The course explored the '3 conversations' approach developed by Partners4Change and provided a list of 50 potential questions for practitioners to consider, add to and adapt for their own practice.

By the end of this one day programme, delegates:

- Were able to define a strengths based approach, its values, importance and benefits
- Knew what the Care Act states about the strengths based approach
- Understood the difference between personal and eligibility outcomes
- Were able to support an individual to define their own outcomes, preferably at the start of an assessment
- Felt confident in using the approach and focusing on the person's skills and strengths, prior to considering their needs
- Further developed their analysis and critical thinking

- Used the strengths based approach when having difficult conversations
- Were able to explore with the person what is available for them in their community
- Adapted and tested out a strengths based list of questions to suit their own practice
- Knew how to use this approach throughout the customer journey

3. Supervision skills

Supervision is central to good practice. Good supervision provides an opportunity to develop reflective thinking which can improve resilience, improves the quality of decision making and interventions, supports professional thinking and prevent failure, helps to identify and achieve personal learning and development opportunities and addresses workload management. It can increase a practitioner's confidence and improve job satisfaction and assure the supervisor that all tasks have been completed, and that practice is legally compliant and meets standards.

This highly interactive day with a number of small and large group exercises explores the aims and functions of supervision, defines good supervision and outlines the values, principles and standards, as set out in Sandwell's Supervision policy. It covers the importance of reflection and powerful questioning, including using the strengths based approach and addressing difficult conversations. It reinforces supervision standards required by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), sets out the responsibilities of both supervisor and supervisee for supervision and defines the supervision contract. It includes an opportunity for supervisees to develop or expand their own resilience toolkit.

By the end of this one day programme, delegates are able to:

- Support staff and managers to develop good reflective skills
- Support managers to develop good supervision skills
- Ensure that both staff and managers were aware of their responsibilities around supervision
- Support managers to have the difficult conversations with staff
- Ensure that staff take responsibility of their HCPC requirements

To date Talking Life delivered, on time and within budget, 16 days' training on 2 of the above topics with successful feedback on each session. The 8 days' supervision training sessions will be delivered in October 2019.

Outcomes

Evaluations were completed by each delegate at the end of every session via Sandwell's online evaluation system.

The sessions were scored either 'good' or 'excellent' by the majority of the delegates.

Linda Francis, the Learning & Development Manager for Sandwell Council gave the project the following testimonial:

“We have used the company Talking Life to deliver Strength Based Assessment and Outcome Focused Care Planning training and Having Different Conversations training to our Social Work and Reablement staff during 2018/19.

We can say that it has been a pleasure working with them. The trainers were both very knowledgeable and have delivered a good standard of training to our staff. Due to the training received, we have achieved the agreed outcomes and staff have embedded learning into practice.

The management of the programme has been very diligent, which ensured the smooth running of the programme. We appreciate the mid-point and final reviews of courses which were factored in by the company as this allowed for effective monitoring of progress and enabled us to address any issues.

We would highly recommend this company as they are very professional and both trainers genuinely have a desire to see a high standard of learning and development of social work staff.”

Conclusion

The training has been extremely successful. The learning outcomes were delivered and the staff have embedded the learning into practice.

Talking Life has subsequently been awarded another contract with Sandwell MBC to deliver another 9 Strengths Based Assessment training sessions during 2019/2020.