

People: Personality and Pathology

A course introducing key concepts and approaches to working with people diagnosable with personality disorder (PD) or complex trauma

Course Report
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1.Introduction

The Thames Valley Initiative was one of eleven pilot projects funded by the Department of Health in response to the policy guidance 'No Longer a Diagnosis of Exclusion' (NIMHE 2003) TVI was of the largest of the projects and included setting up Complex Needs services in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. Hand-in-hand with the need for new services, improved training was identified as a key requirement for improving provision.

The flagship course, started in Wallingford in 2003, was closely based on the aspirations of the Capabilities Framework (NIMHE 2003) - being an open-access, multi-disciplinary and cross-agency network building and skills-based training. It has run every year since, and the model has been used across the South-East.

The course has evolved over the past ten years to reflect changing needs and in response to feedback received from the participants. During this time 203 people have taken part in this course. The participants have come from across the Thames Valley and as far afield as Bedfordshire and Devon as our reputation increases. One of the original premises of our training was that we would equip participants with skills and knowledge which they could then use in their practice to improve service user experience, but also that they could then transfer this learning to their organisations and colleagues. We believe that the 200 plus people that have been on our courses will have done this and that the effect will be great. We have had feedback from past course members citing how this course has influenced their career choices and that some have gone on to specialise in this field and to manage positive change in practice.

The majority of trainees have been from statutory mental health services and voluntary organisations. We pride ourselves on our capacity to train multi-agency groups with a wide range of capabilities. Our participants have come to us with a diverse range of knowledge and experience including Consultant Psychiatrists, nurses, social workers, support workers, probation staff, prison officers and many more.

This report aims to document the history of the People Personality and Pathology Course from its inception in 2003 to the current day. It will highlight the elements of the course that make it successful and demonstrate some of the outcomes that we have achieved and the challenges that we have faced. We hope that this report will support the notion that improved training remains a key requirement for improving provision and as such deserves support and recognition in order for it to continue and thrive in this current economic climate.

Our training philosophy

Underlying the treatment and training programs in the Thames Valley is the *recovery model*. This does not see “personality disorder” as an untreatable lifelong disability, but predominantly as a developmental consequence of disempowering experience. Through this, people become socially excluded and increasingly rejected. It was recognized that there was a major deficit of training in this area and the government at the time, provided a pump-priming funding of money to address this need. The Thames Valley Initiative (Tvi) was commissioned to deliver this training across Oxfordshire, Berkshire, and Buckinghamshire and it was through this support that the ‘People Personality and Pathology’ (PPP) course was born. Other courses were set up in different areas of the south such as Surrey & Sussex, Hampshire and Isle of Wight and Kent, but these no longer continue.

The PPP course was designed to educate participants about personality disorder; but importantly it was to challenge stigma and promote positive changes in working practice. The course has been designed and developed by professionals with multi-agency backgrounds alongside service users with the diagnosis of personality disorder. The following are some quotes from participants of our early courses.

‘A very human approach – I left feeling more sympathetic to clients.’

‘It felt less like “us versus them”’

‘A very useful, even inspiring, opening up of our thinking about ‘madness’ treatment, personal freedom and responsibility’.

‘I learned a lot about working with PD in the work discussion groups’

‘A useful alternative to traditional care provision’

‘Inspiring’

‘Insight into others contact with clients helped in reducing feelings of isolation’

It is important that the training is Inclusive and accessible. It is a multi-agency, multi-sector course with a mechanism for cascade of awareness through course participants. We develop and maintain constructive working relationships with service users, their family members, colleagues, lay people and the wider community networks.

Course Structure

The year long course structure has been developed by clinicians working in partnership with service users. It has had a variety of formats over the last ten years, for example the 2008 course involved a full day at the beginning and end of the course and eight half days between. Students were advised to seek study leave for the morning of the eight half days to allow for the developing of work based projects. In addition there was a three day residential 'Living Learning Experience' in Kent on the first weekend after the course commenced. This setting up of a transient therapeutic community gave participants a taster of how therapy may feel to their clients.

In 2011 we moved the half day model to full days in recognition of the fact that we were now attracting participants from an area broader than the Thames Valley e.g. Exeter and it was no longer practical to expect people to travel so far for such a short amount of time. Other elements of the course remain the same.

Theory about personality disorder is included in the programme but the main thrust of the course is to challenge negative attitudes towards service users and to develop skills to improve services for people diagnosed with personality disorder. The course also aims to improve inter agency communication and increase cohesive well-coordinated care plans.

Key elements of the course structure are:

- Reflective practice groups facilitated by experienced clinicians and STARS (ex service user group) to support students with their active casework and promote changes in working practice.
- Theory seminars to provide an understanding of PD theory, current treatment options and research outcomes.
- Awareness and skills sessions facilitated by STARS to help students understand the service user perspective, to discover what service users found helpful and unhelpful and to develop their skills in responding to people with personality disorder.
- Project groups facilitated by PD staff and ex-service users. The aim of these groups is to promote cross agency networks and support the development of training and generate projects that improve practice in the workplace.
- Residential Living Learning Experience. This is run as a planned therapeutic environment, similar to the structure of the Complex Needs Services, where students experience at first hand groups and community meetings. It is a challenging weekend but from feedback is widely regarded as having the maximum impact on attitude change.
- See Appendix 1: for more detailed information about the course structure, aims and rationale.

STARS (Support Training and Recovery System)

The STARS group are ex service users who have successfully completed a course of therapy in the specialist complex needs services, and who have a special interest in raising awareness about effective practice. They meet with the Tvi training team monthly and contribute to training events locally and nationally. This work is currently administered and funded by Tvi. Evaluation of the contributions STARS members make to TVI training events is consistently highly scored. STARS are involved in designing the PPP course and contribute to the work discussion and project groups as well as facilitating the skills seminars.

“Working with the ex service users has made me change the way I think about the PD people on my caseload” CPN, PPP course.

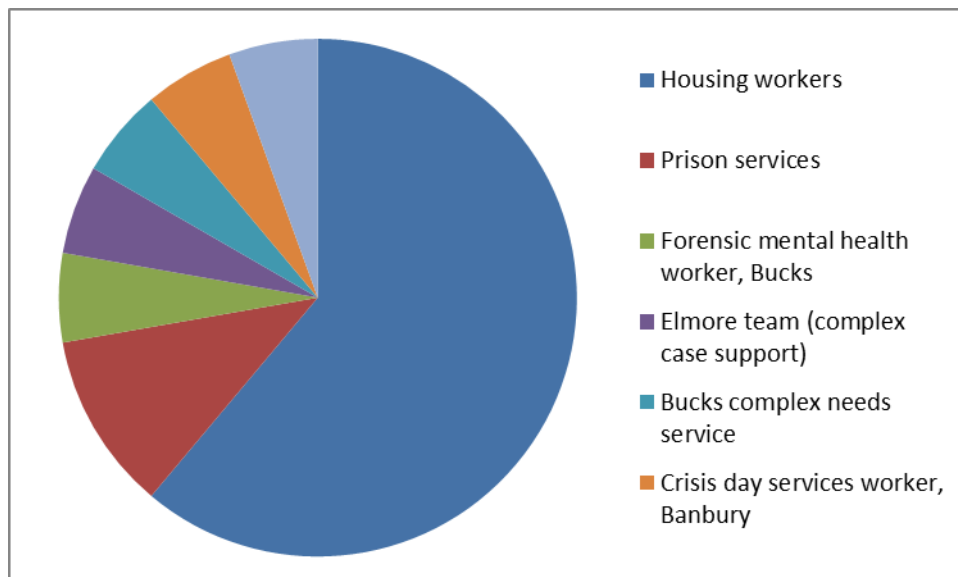
“ I really enjoyed the input from STARS. They helped me understand what drives peoples’ behaviour”.

Course Attendance

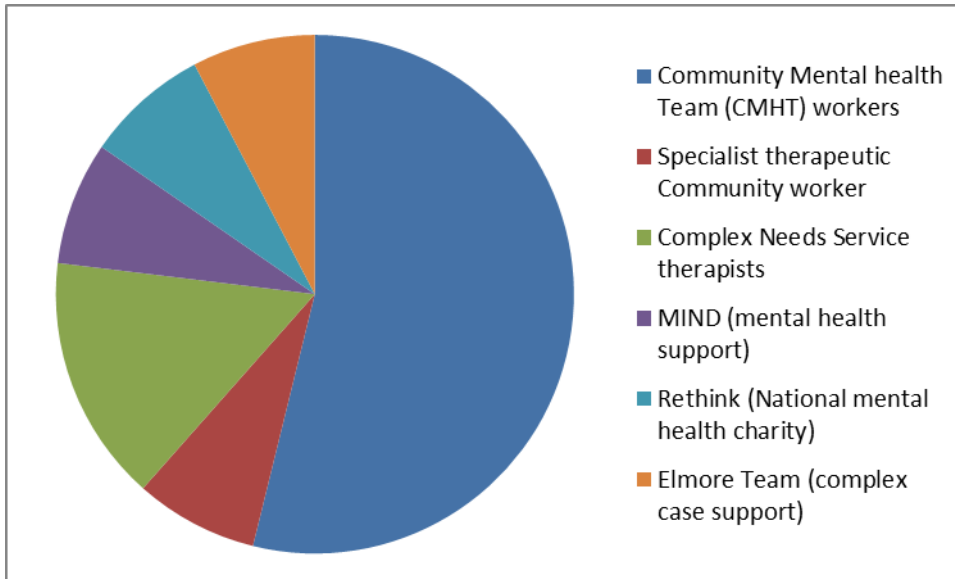
Approx. 25 places have been filled each year since 2003 to 2009 with minimal advertising. This had dropped to 13 places filled in 2013, probably due to the economic situation. There is still a high demand with around 60 expressions of interest for each cohort. Of those who did not pursue their applications the majority said they could not get funding. This would seem to account for the reduced numbers in recent years. However this trend now seems to be reversing and the 2014 cohort has received more expressions of interest than ever before and we are even considering if it would be viable to put on two courses to meet the demand.

Example of breakdown of recent year’s participants

2012 course – 18 students started the course, 13 completed with the required 80% attendance

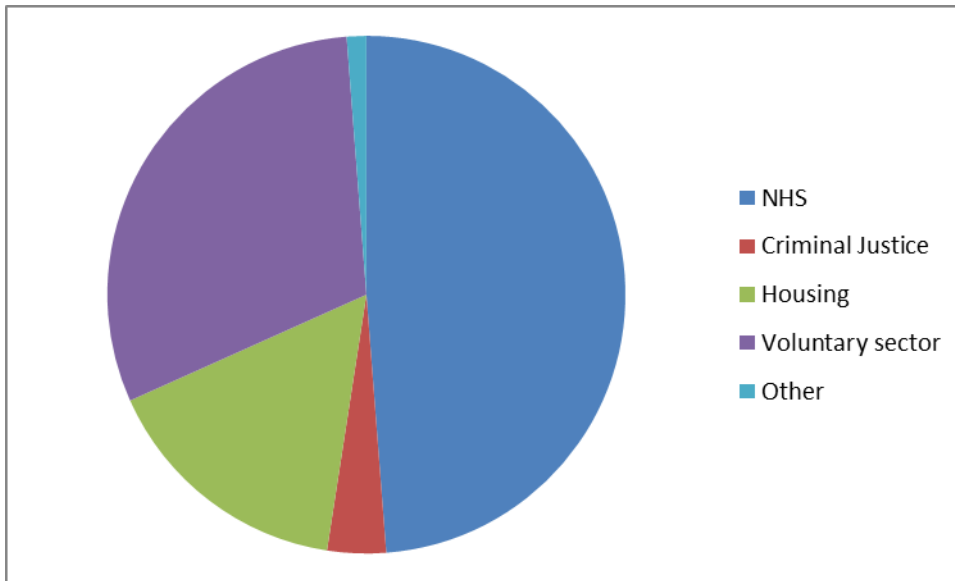


2013 course; 13 students started course, 12 completed with the required 80%attendance



The majority of applicants for this course come by recommendation from previous course participants and from managers of services who had previously sponsored staff to attend. Reduced cost places were given to TVI partner organisations (MIND and Elmore).

Spread of participants by workplace, 2009-2013 inclusive



Learning Outcomes

Assessment against course learning objectives is evaluated via the completion of reflective summaries and a project presentation. Students are required to submit a summary of their reflective diaries which are assessed for understanding of theory, development of skills and evidence of contribution to service development. The minimum word count is 750 but students are invited to expand on this if they wish. The rationale for this is that the course is designed for a range of disciplines and grades.

Reflective summaries:

Reflective summaries are scored by course staff against pre-agreed criteria.

These reflective accounts were insightful and often moving as students openly share their prejudices, how their attitudes had shifted and the new skills that have been acquired.

The most significant themes that emerged in the summaries over the years has consistently been a marked shift in attitude towards service users, increased confidence and self reflection, and motivation to share knowledge and improve services in work places.

“...it is evident now that I have a broad plan for my own development and for the leading forward of a new service. I am keen that we grow our skills and develop a vital and valuable new service which is recognised as offering a very different dimension of care together with a philosophy that challenges much of the prevailing orthodoxy within local mental health services.” Project manager.

“ I found the input from the STARS the most helpful throughout the course. Having the STARS workers also enabled me to think more positively about the Recovery approach. This was through seeing people that have had a diagnosis of personality disorder and have been through a therapeutic community, and are now living independently and getting on well with their lives.”
RMN

“Such a practical approach to teaching has given me the confidence to be able to disseminate my learning to colleagues in the work place, as well as encouragement to the patients that I work with” RMN

“I have enjoyed the course and it has certainly changed my perspective of patients with personality disorder. The knowledge I have gained will enable me to assist my team to help these clients in a more positive way that promotes recovery. Acute Ward RMN

Commenting on STARS “This was because these lectures were very impacting on me, as it felt very “real life” to me hearing the experiences of previous sufferers and how they dealt with their problems to overcome them. In particular, the role plays involved in the lectures were hard hitting for me and it made me think a lot more about what service users diagnosed with personality disorder go through while they are in crisis., as well as that there is hope that they can get over difficulties and lead normal lives.” Supported housing worker.

Work based projects

Students are divided into project groups where they are expected to produce, individually or with others, a piece of work that is relevant to their practice and that will have a positive impact on service provision. These groups are designed to promote the application of theory in the workplace and to develop inter agency co operation.

This year, for example, the project groups have focussed on projects ranging from a project looking at the needs of young people who have a parent with a diagnosis of Personality Disorder, to a crisis leaflet for practitioners' to hand out when people are having trouble coping. Some of the more substantive projects over the past years have been incorporated into mainstream services as valuable resources these include a 'Do's and Don'ts' (working with PD) poster that has been laminated and displayed across the Oxfordshire mental health trust, and a toolkit for working with people in an in-patient setting that has been utilised by the Warneford hospital in Oxford.

Course fees

Presently, the total cost for the course is £985 including the residential weekend and light refreshments on course days. The majority of course members are funded by their organisation, but we are getting increasing interest in people who are willing to wholly or partly self-fund as our reputation grows.

Key points:

- This course has evolved as a result of participant's feedback over the past ten years to provide an immeasurable resource for practitioners working with people who have a diagnosis of Personality Disorder.
- The course staff are experts in this field and work in partnership with STARS who are ex-service users, who have a lived experience of this diagnosis.
- It has a sound theoretical framework, but the greatest value is that it is not focused in academia. It provides an experiential training, accessible to staff from a variety of backgrounds and experience.
- It is a practice based course that is proven to change attitudes, challenge stigma, increase confidence and ultimately improve practice and be of immense benefit to the service users.
- Once trained the practitioners implement change in their own professional spheres and this will have a 'ripple' effect to all other areas of work. The staff become agents of change and this will impact all services.

"Nice combination of didactic and informal teaching"

Future directions:

2014 will see the start of our eleventh cohort.

We continue to be responsive to feedback and the course will start in March this year as a result of a January start being problematic in previous years, due to inclement weather. Our core staff will remain largely the same although the STARS that were involved in 2013 have moved on to new areas of work and their position will be advertised amongst the network. We will once again be hosting several seminars with external speakers to include their particular specialisms. 2014 will see a revival of our 'PD agents' network. Graduates of the course will be given the opportunity for further learning and development after the course has completed. This will allow the networks to continue as past participants will be invited to workshops during the year. This will allow the work of the projects to continue and thrive and will provide a space for the learning to be maintained and for future opportunities to be discussed

Whilst our PPP course remains the flagship course for the Thames Valley Initiative our success has spring boarded demand for many other training opportunities to be set up. In 2013 we received the contract to train 120 housing workers employed by Oxford City Council and 12 housing workers attended the PPP course that year. This training led to similar smaller projects with SHP in London and Reading Borough Council.

Tvi is the chosen provider of the Knowledge and Understanding Framework Personality Disorder Awareness training for Berks, Bucks, Oxon and Hants / IOW and have now trained in excess of 1000 people since 2010.

We run various skills day across the area including a day looking at skills to work with people who self-harm or have a Personality Disorder. These are very successful and there have been requests to make them mandatory across the trust. We are hoping to implement this training package across the Southern region as it is clear that there is a demand for this training. A one day training is also available for reception / administrative staff to enhance the first point of call experience for patients, whose presentation might be challenging.

"I felt she (STAR) made the session and really helped me understand PD. It makes a change having someone that has been through the services, rather than a professional, that has studied the illness" Housing worker

We are having an increasing number of requests from schools and youth groups to implement training. We hope to pursue this as early intervention is key factor in tackling the difficulties associated with Personality Disorder before they get too entrenched.

STARS: www.starspdconsortium.co.uk

Our work with STARS goes from strength to strength. We now have around twenty ex-service users at our monthly meetings. STARS are people who have successfully completed the Complex Needs service in the Thames Valley and choose to remain involved in training, service development, and engagement work to name a few. STARS are part of the core team for the PPP course and all our training in the Thames Valley is done in this partnership model: service user and clinician working together. Our trainings are unusual for this and it is what makes it so valuable.

“The fact that actual service users came and were willing to share their experiences (good and Bad) with us. Thanks.” Support worker

“Marvellous course - I very much like this kind of training. Superb STAR workers-excellent facilitators-great combination”

Appendix 1

SECTION A: AIMS AND RATIONALE

1 Aims of the course

The aim of this practice based course is to equip you to work effectively with people diagnosed with personality disorder in a range of settings and to enable you to disseminate knowledge and skills with your colleagues using a positive recovery orientated approach.

The course is designed to have an impact on your practice and we encourage graduates of the course to become agents of change in the workplace, working with teams and individuals to promote empowerment and recovery of service users.

2 Rationale for the course

Agencies working with people who have personality disorder/complex needs have long recognised their unique problems and are familiar with the difficulties providing an effective service for them. Professionals often feel ill equipped or isolated, and burnout is a common consequence.

This course was developed by experienced clinicians and ex service users to enable effective application of skills in the workplace. With this primary aim in mind the course is designed to be practice based and to reflect this aim your final assessment will be made on work based projects and reflective practice.

3 Learning outcomes; by the end of the course you will be able to

- Discuss the concept of personality development and personality disorder.
- Discuss the impact of early trauma on personality development
- Reflect on your own beliefs and attitudes towards people with personality disorder and how this might impact on others
- Use supervision to understand the dynamics of your relationships with clients and plan strategies to enable effective therapeutic relationships
- Discuss a range of models for recovery
- Use your knowledge, skills and self awareness to respond positively when working with people with personality problems
- Recognise tensions, conflicts and misunderstandings that can occur between teams working with this client group
- Disseminate knowledge and skills to colleagues
- Participate in the improvement of services in your workplace

4 Structure of the course

- Theory seminars. These will be led by a range of external speakers with extensive experience in the field of personality disorder treatment.
- Project groups. These groups will be facilitated by experienced practitioners and ex service users to help you develop innovative and effective projects relevant to your particular field of practice.
- Skills groups. These groups will focus on developing practical skills such as working effectively with boundaries and assessing risk.
- Case discussion groups. In these groups you will have an opportunity to explore issues that arise in your work with people with personality disorders.
- 3 day residential group experience. This 3 day living learning experience will help you gain an understanding of group dynamics. This part of the course is facilitated by experienced group therapists who will lead the therapy groups and join you in community activities.

You are also required to keep a reflective journal throughout the course and use it to inform a written summary of your experiences during the year and what you have learned. This should include examples of awareness of your own attitudes towards people with a personality disorder. The summaries will be submitted to the course committee at the end of unit seven which is the penultimate unit.

Appendix 2 – Card designed by project group for placement in Drs surgeries, housing offices etc etc. Showing front and back of card



Our personality is the essential ingredient that makes us all unique. Personalities can be seen as jigsaw pieces of feelings, thoughts and behaviours. Some of us can have problems putting the pieces together and understanding ourselves, our feelings and our behaviour, making life feel unmanageable.

PERSONALITY

Find out more by



✚ speaking to your GP

✚ checking out these websites

www.emergenceplus.org.uk

www.personalitydisorder.org.uk

www.starspdconsortium.com

www.mind.org.uk

www.rethink.org

✚ getting in touch with us here

Oxford Complex Needs

www.psox.org/ocns

01865 455872/815

✚ reading these books

I Hate You Don't Leave Me (Kreisman & Straus)

Walking on Eggshells (Mason & Kreger)

make a note here