



Support Training And Recovery Systems

NEWSLETTER

10 Years Anniversary

February 2005 - May 2015

http://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/service_description/thames-valley-initiative
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A few sentences from Dr Rex Haigh, Programme Director (2004-2008)

When we called a meeting of ex-TC members, to help us with the 'Training, Research and Recovery' work of the newly established Thames Valley Initiative, I don't think we realised how far ahead of the pack - of most thinking in mental health - that we were. Even the use of flashy acronyms was in its infancy, and Sheena's inspired 'Support, Training and Recovery System' was way ahead of its time.

Trendy bandwagons have come along - such as 'recovery', service users interviewing for senior staff, 'co-production', 'empowerment' - but STARS, with the 'intensive emotional education' that everybody gets by being a member of a TC, were there first - and I would say are still doing it with more authenticity, experience, expertise (and fun!) than the rest of the pack.

I think the place we held it was called 'Café du Sport', in West Street in Reading - a rather sleazy night-club as I remember, just owned and refurbished by a new lottery millionaire. He was happy to let us use the upstairs dancing area for lunch and during the afternoon, and supplied us with plates and trays of sandwiches, chicken bits, sausages, dips and all sorts of food for lunch. A good TC always thinks with a full stomach! I remember feeling grateful to the owner of Café du Sport and the lottery itself - and thinking 'these groups are a bit different to the one we have in the TC' - as we all sat on funky multi-coloured psychedelic pouffes, tucking into all the goodies they gave us for lunch.

Sadly, I soon became too involved with other work to be able to come to STARS regularly - at one time it was the highlight of my month to come along to STARS and hear about the great range of things the members were getting up to - really changing the hearts and minds of mental health staff who didn't understand therapeutic communities or 'personality disorder'.



*Cafe du Sport, Reading
where STARS first met!*



*The Barn Centre, Thame
where STARS meet now!*

Since it's initial concept 10 years ago, STARS has now evolved and grown greatly in number! Consisting of ex-Service Users from Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire, who have had a diagnosis of or show traits of Personality Disorder and have completed their therapeutic journey through the Complex Needs Services. We meet monthly in Thame now, at The Barn Centre, but our training is all year round and can be booked via Sue Pauley for us to come and train you in-house or you can attend one of our many training courses (details available on our website).

What is STARS...?

STARS (Support, Training and Recovery Systems) members work alongside the clinicians of TVI (Thames Valley Initiative), to provide training and raise awareness of Personality Disorder and to help clients engage with services and recover.

Our clients have included local councils, housing, support workers, probation services, charities, homeless hostels, AMHTs/mental health workers, GPs, forensic units, college & university students, school nurses, administration staff and the police. We also support potential and existing clients of the Complex Needs Service in Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire. For more information visit www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/service_description/thames-valley-initiative or contact Sue Pauley at Sue@tvi2i.net/07815902049



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News in brief...

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Happy Birthday to STARS!
We are 10 years old this year!



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STARS welcome 4 new members to the group since our last issue!

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New KUF (Knowledge and Understanding Framework) contract delivering training in the Surrey area

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New PPP (People, Personality and Pathology) course started in March and the LLE weekend (Living, Learning Experience) a huge success

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STARS and TVI secure new contracts in Hampshire for training the Police service and Probation Administration Staff

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One more STAR member qualifies to deliver KUF (Knowledge and Understanding Framework) Training

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STARS & TVI deliver training for Supported Housing Workers in Ashford for Learning Disability Clients who have a Personality Disorder

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Strangely strange but oddly normal

*Dear diary, what a day its been
Changed my medication
You won't believe what I have seen
The sunrise this morning was pure gold,
Was it real? Was it a dream?
It was certainly something to behold
Rays that sparkled across the sky,
Pale pink clouds held on gossamer thread.
I didn't like to ask how, or why
However I do think it's time to get out of bed*

*Strangely strange but oddly normal.
First things first, I must get dressed!
Smart but casual, nothing too formal
Don't want anything that needs to be pressed.*

*Cup of tea, get my head into gear
Face the world, nothing to fear.
Choose a hat, who shall I be today?
Trying to gather my thoughts as they
appear so far away...*

*Take my dog out for a walk
Mutter 'good morning' to passers by
"Hi, hello!" I hope they don't want to talk;
"How are you?" I say without really knowing
why*

*What was said next, I haven't a clue;
Try to stop my head from doing a dance.
'Don't wish to be rude, but who are you?'
Have we met somewhere by chance?'*

*Did I speak out loud?
Why are they looking at me with such intent?
I try to walk away, head bowed
They want to know what it was that I meant
I really have no idea
People stopping, it's becoming a crowd*

*Something messing up my brain
I won't be putting this hat on again*

*Open fields, river running by
I sit on the bank and have a good cry.*

*Amazing colours, everywhere I look
Feeling better now, a big smile on my face.
Alice in Wonderland, now that was a good
Book
Mind skipping from place to place.*

*What is true? What is real?
Who am I? What is happening to me?
I can only tell you how I feel,
Not now; we shall have to wait and see*

*I've never been one to hug a tree
Not really into talking to plants
However, I'd swear that bush is smiling at me
"Hello," I say, "would you care to dance?"*

*The day carried on in a similar vein
I managed to get home, wherein I stay
I won't be taking that medication again!
Well, at least not every day.....*

By Tim C.

A STAR's Personal Recollection...

The creation of STARS formalised occasional training which had been going on for several years. In 2000 I was attending Winterbourne House Therapeutic Community in Reading and I remember Rex taking a group of us out to a hospital to present a session to trainee doctors. We role-played a breach of rules in a TC and got the doctors to play other community members - joining in with the process of discussing it and then voting on whether to exclude the person who had broken the rules. I felt quite mischievous to be turning the tables on staff like that!

It was treated very much as part of our therapy - an optional community activity, planned and prepared together and with encouragement to discuss any issues raised by it in our therapy groups. It felt safe and fun to me, but I have heard since that TC staff had mixed opinions about whether involving service users in training was a good idea or not.

STARS does not treat the training we do as therapy, though of course we benefit from the experience in various ways. We have all finished major therapy at least 6 months ago (and some of us much more than that) and can take responsibility for our own mental wellbeing if something about the training happens to upset us. We are able to talk reflectively about our experiences and give staff and current service users a taste of what life after therapy might be like. These days our training tends to contain more information than that early session, but role-plays can still be very helpful to bring the facts and theories to life.

Talking to GP's

The STAR who came was:

"...clear, confident, excellent description of the process and effect of diagnosis and treatment, challenging and thoughtful, and able to give feedback that professionally would have been difficult for me (e.g. you shouldn't always believe what your patient tells you. Did you check it out? Are you colluding in some way?)

An engagement group in Oxford

After being referred, either by themselves or others, the first point of contact between a client and the Oxfordshire Complex Needs Service is to be invited to an engagement group. This is a short group of about an hour where the structure and basics of the therapy service are explained, prospective members have the opportunity to ask questions and get some understanding of what they're joining before they go on to the assessment stage. The group is run by a trained member of staff and two STARS members also attend to offer their perspective as ex-service users.

The last one I attended was a small group, only about 8 people were there. As ever there were some people who asked questions and others who stayed quiet. Everyone seemed to listen and to appreciate the opportunity that Complex Needs offered, while some were struggling in the meeting they all stayed and were paying attention. I was glad that the atmosphere was positive, even though there was a long wait until assessment after this meeting everyone seemed more patient than I think I would have been!

I felt that people were interested in what the STARS had to say, we had a good rapport with the staff member and were able to chip in freely to elaborate on points, offer personal anecdotes and answer questions. I'm always struck by how much I can relate to how people are feeling at that stage of their journey and by how far I've come. It's a reminder of how much the service helped me and gives me an opportunity to advocate for the service to others. I remember how overwhelming it all seemed back then and that hearing people from STARS talk helped me start to trust that there could be hope in sight!

Meeting with potential CNS client

I just wanted to feedback a very big thank you for sending your STAR along to meet with my client today. I was most appreciative of his excellent presentation. The level and pitch of the information imparted, was engaging and informative, and I felt provided my client with a very experiential idea of what he could expect, boundaries and the possibilities.

Community of Communities Annual Forum: 30th April 2015

Subject: "The role of play in Therapeutic Communities"

I had the privilege to be able to attend this forum (though it didn't feel that much of a privilege when my alarm went off at 5.25am!). Sadly the journey to London was somewhat delayed, so I missed the opening sessions. However, I came in during a session entitled "Community Members with lived experience – Getting involved with the Community of Communities". One of the speakers was a member of STARS, "N", who spoke about her role as a Lead Reviewer, conducting reviews of Therapeutic Communities. Sadly I missed much of the opening discussion, but was very impressed by the clarity and insight with which she responded to questions from the delegates.

After a brief break, we had a lecture on "Play – its meaning and importance in therapeutic environments", by Nick Benefield. Nick took us through an immense amount of material, starting with definitions of play, and moving on to why it is such a necessary part of our lives, including many engaging stories of how its use has been beneficial to people in TC's, particularly within the prison setting. He also told stories of how its use has helped others: particularly interesting to me was the benefits to people with memory loss. This was a fast – moving and inspiring lecture.

After lunch, "Good Vibrations" led an experiential workshop on how they use a Gamelan orchestra within a therapy session. They were given the unenviable task of demonstrating a whole week's worth of workshops in only 45 minutes. Some of the delegates had the opportunity to take part, and feed back how they felt about it. Particularly inspiring, again, were some of the stories of how people have benefitted from taking part in the workshops: again, particularly within the prison setting.

We then attended workshops in smaller groups. I opted for one run by Dr George Harris entitled "Introducing the therapeutic benefits of everyday play activities". George worked with children, and his enthusiasm was incredibly infectious. I could easily have listened to him for the whole day – and we might have had opportunity to try some of the activities he had brought along! He showed us how crucial play is in our development as children, and it was very clear what difficulties might ensue if some aspects were lacking from our experience. Again, George illustrated the session with helpful examples from his own work.

Sadly I had to miss the last two sessions, as we left early in an attempt to miss the rush hour: it still took us nearly 4 hours to get from London to Oxford! The lunch was excellent (though I'm still slightly unnerved by the video camera next to the chocolate brownies!), and it was really good to spend some time with one of the newest members of STARS.

In summary, I found this to be an excellent day – engaging and informative, with plenty to think about afterwards. In particular I was aware of the impact of linking the theory to so many examples of positive outcomes, and this made me realise anew how important the contribution that STARS make is.

I think the only disappointing thing about the day was that I wasn't able to be there for all of it. Would I recommend other STARS to attend in future years? Certainly! Would I go again? Most definitely! (Though I might be tempted to organise my own transport!)

Some of the STARS/TVI training courses include:

Knowledge and Understanding Personality Disorder Awareness Training (KUF)

This government-funded training consists of three facilitated days alongside personal work using a virtual learning experience designed by the Open University alongside professionals and ex-service users

People: Personality and Pathology

This multidisciplinary, experiential course runs one day a month from March to November. Theory is covered, a project of the participants choosing is undertaken, and time is spent in small groups discussion of work situations. A residential weekend is included where participants can experience life as a member of a transient therapeutic community.

Dealing with challenging behaviour

This course is designed for administrative and non-clinical staff who may face difficult situations in the course of their daily work. It gives space to think about how reactions may influence the outcome of the encounter.

Personality Disorder Skills Day

A day exploring practical ideas to promote good services for those diagnosable with personality disorder.

Self harm Skills Day

A day exploring practical idea to promote good services to those who self harm in a wide variety of ways.

Workforce development

Training whole staff teams is an effective way to create a culture of positivity and hope when working with the challenging issues people with personality disorder and complex trauma present within organisations. The practice-based modules equip all grades of staff with the skill sets required for effective practice. Students work with people who have a lived experience of personality disorder or complex trauma.

PPP (People: Personality & Pathology) Course

I was one of three STARS involved in last year's PPP course (People, Personality and Pathology). Over the eight month course we got to know our students well, sharing our perspective as former service users both in the working project groups and the work supervision groups. Every month we'd feel heartened by the incredible efforts to understand and help people like us, people who were struggling to come to terms with their difficulties and deal with them. We knew how difficult we had been for the people trying to help us, when we were struggling, how tough it could be to hold any hope for ourselves and find solutions instead of more problems. Sometimes, we knew, it seemed as though we were self sabotaging, sabotaging the efforts of the very people who were trying to help us through.

I realise now that the people who helped me to learn how to live with myself, despite all my issues and difficulties, despite my bad start in life, are just that; people. One of the things I always stress to anyone training with us now is to take care of yourself! I used to think that the people I came into contact with (nurses, doctors, therapists, social workers, CPNs) were super heroes, with endless energy and all the answers, if they would only take the time to pass their infinite wisdom on to me (no such luck). Now I realise that no one has all the answers, that everyone gets it wrong sometimes, and that nine times out of ten mistakes are made with the best of intentions. All we can really do is help people to help themselves. We can enable people to take back their lives and live them to the fullest.

I recently had the pleasure of working again with someone from last year's PPP course and it was great to see her in her usual working environment, to meet with one of her clients, who is now considering the Complex Needs Service as a next step to being well.

This years PPP course has just begun, the Living Learning Experience having been completed in April, when the students and some of the staff team went away for a weekend together, to model group bonding and learning, just like we do in Therapeutic Communities!

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Sudoku Challenge 1

			9			5		
	2	3	7			8		
6				3			9	1
						1		
2			3		9			
		9					5	4
			4					
						7		
	5				7			3

Sudoku Challenge 2

		4		1			2	
5			6					
	2					5		9
2					8	6		7
	3							
	4		7					
			4			8	7	
	1				9			
7				2				5

STARS training within the Criminal Justice System

2015 has seen STARS and TVI travelling to Winchester and Southampton to deliver training to all of the Administration staff in Hampshire and Isle of Wight Community Rehabilitation Services as well as Hampshire Constabulary.

“It has been exciting to venture to new locations and raise awareness of personality disorder with the probation admin staff and the police; with the police we were training detectives, police officers, community support officers and call handlers.”

Although the days have been long, taking into account the long travel distances each way, the days have also been incredibly rewarding!

“To be a part of this training venture, being an ex-offender and having spent my convictions, it has been a chance for me to measure how much I have changed, rehabilitated and learnt from my past misdemeanours. All the hard work I have done in therapy and the self awareness I have learnt made me realise how different I am now and how much of a horrible person I was then!”

Sharing my experiences, explaining like I could never do at the time, my thinking behind my actions and behaviours then, hopefully will make the authorities look at offenders with personality disorder in a more supportive light – not to let them off and to still make them account for any criminal activity but maybe signpost them towards seeking some help from the correct services so that they too may turn their lives around like I was given the chance to, before it gets too late.

Of course, not all police callouts are for criminal behaviours – many callouts are for “mental health” reasons – and these too will from now on, be looked at in a different light: rather than be frustrated with ‘yet another crazy person acting out’ by sharing our experiences and answering questions, we hope that the number of these callouts do get redirected to the right services so that proper support and treatment can be accessed by the individual and the police can free up resources.

“Although I have had no contact with the police for over 6 years now, I still get butterflies when I see the uniform or a police car even though I know I’ve done nothing wrong or that they aren’t going to take me away.”

The training days have all been fantastic and very well received, with lots of interaction from the trainees and participation. A lot of positive feedback and a considerable change/shift in awareness of personality disorder and how to keep boundaries and not escalate the situation; manage the crisis and support the individual.

Well done to all the STARS involved!
A good team effort!!

Learning Disabilities and Supported Housing

We have recently been asked to train Housing Officers who work for a private Supported Housing organisation in Ashford, in Personality Disorder. Together with a TVI member, I went along to the first session and what an experience! What greeted us by way of the venue and facilities was definitely a challenge that we both, I feel, rose to magnificently; it just went to show how versatile and adaptable STARS and TVI can really be!!

The delegation was small, so we adapted our skills day to a more informal training stance, with PowerPoint presentation complimenting a more general discussion and questions and answers sessions throughout the day with lots of shared personal experiences and talking about difficulties in the workplace with challenging clients.

A good day with lots of excellent feedback, this approach worked well as we were able to tailor the training to meet the clients individual needs as we had such a small group. As we had gone along to do in-house training within the organisation, the work place discussions flowed very well, keeping in mind the boundaries around confidentiality and initialling client’s names rather than calling them out in full meant that the trainees were able to communicate freely and know who each one was talking about.

The second session is next month! Let’s hope they are more prepared for us this time!!