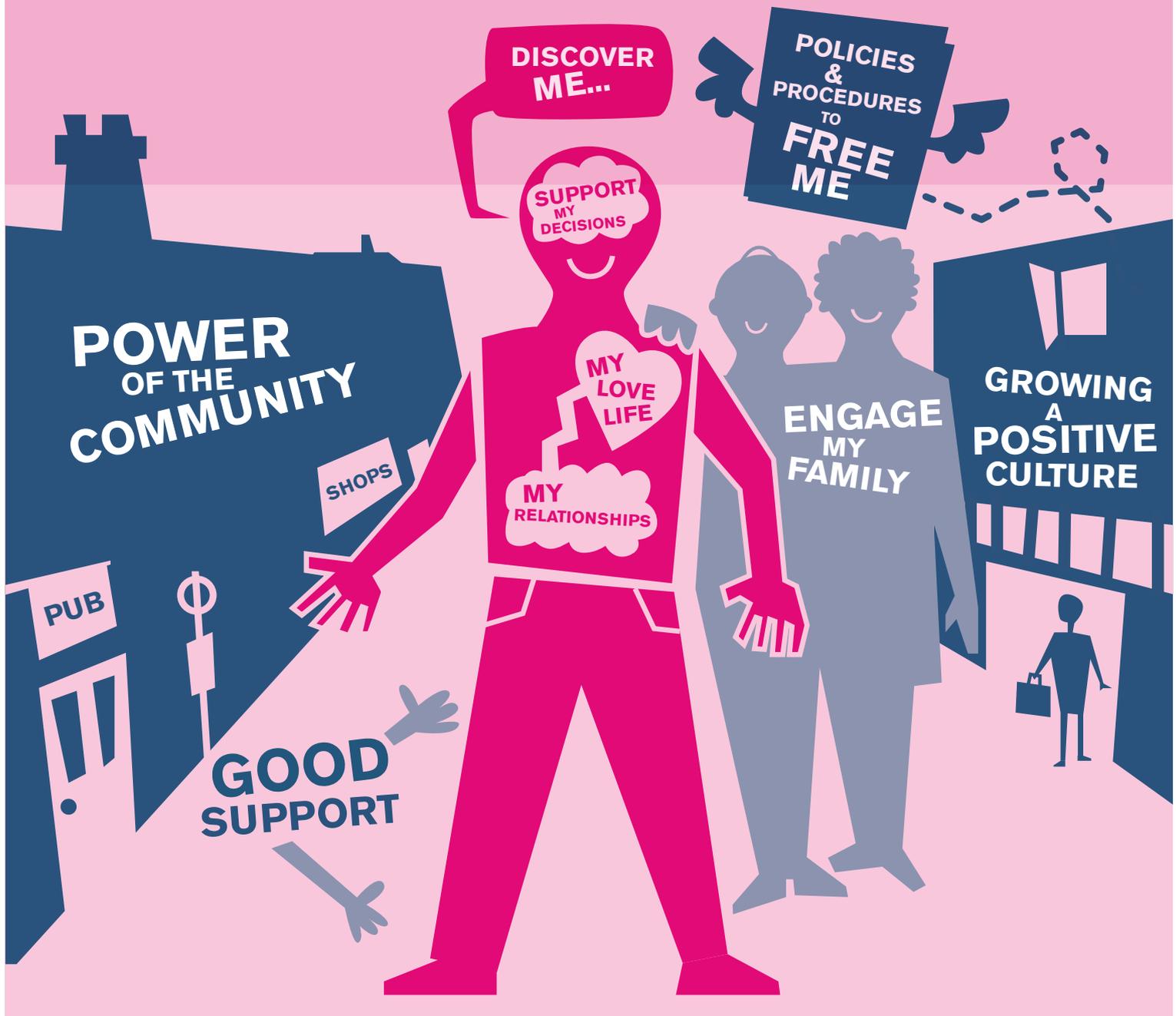


# Playing Your Part in Creating Positive Cultures

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# The story so far

2012

John O'Brien, David Towell and Sally Warren facilitated a workshop and asked self advocates, families and professionals from twenty agencies:

*What threatens an organisation's ability to support relationships that connect the heart and the mind?*

You can see a summary of the discussion and action in our paper **Re-connecting Hearts and Minds**.

2013

John O'Brien and Sally Warren facilitated a workshop for self advocates, families and professionals, addressing one of the key themes identified by the Ensuring an Ordinary Life for All network. This was the concern about

the heavy restrictions placed on people by the vast number of Policies and Procedures created, often in response to crisis, over the years. How do we co-design a new way?

You can see a summary of the discussion and action in John's paper **Healing Integrity Gaps**.

2014

Paradigm invited organisations from across England and Wales to participate in a national network that would look at how to:

- Create a vision of an ordinary life for all
- Explore what currently hinders people and what helps people live good ordinary lives

- Support each other to identify action that would make a difference and then commit to carrying out those actions

You can see a summary of the discussion and action in the paper by Sally Warren and Jo Giles **An Ordinary Life. The Way Forward**.

2015/16

The Creating Positive Cultures project invited colleagues from a number of organisations to come together to share and identify practices in their organisation that were causing concern.

Each team was supported to work with people supported, families and colleagues to find a way of addressing these concerns.

This report shares the learning and action from the project.

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- Real Life Options
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- Wilf Ward Family Trust

# Glossary

## Culture

Organisational culture is a system of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs, which governs how people behave in organizations. These shared values have a strong influence on the people in the organisation. Every organisation develops and maintains a unique culture, which provides guidelines and boundaries for the behavior of the members of the organisation. *Source: John McLaughlin, study.com.*

## Integrity Gap

The gap between stated values and practice.

## Co-production

When you as an individual are involved as an equal partner in designing the support and services you receive. Co-production recognises that people who use social care services (and their families) have knowledge and experience that can be used to help make services better, not only for themselves but for other people who need social care. *Source: TLAP Jargon Buster, thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk*

# Introduction: Setting the scene for the programme

“ It will be frustrating, we will feel limited and fallible, but if we are aligned with people's deepest desires and highest potential we will keep going.”

John O'Brien. Paradigm Webinar 2016

Creating Positive Cultures was an initiative established by Paradigm, a UK based training and development agency working primarily with organisations that provide support for people with learning disabilities.

This initiative emerged out of a series of workshops and projects facilitated by Sally Warren and associates from Paradigm over the previous few years with the support of John O'Brien and David Towell, leading thinkers in this field. In these workshops participants expressed concerns and identified a number of constraints that mitigate against the provision of the quality of support that is desired by people with learning disabilities and support workers alike. In response Paradigm organised the *Creating Positive Cultures* programme, a series of workshops and interventions designed to help teams identify barriers to the provision of person-centred services and to develop and pilot possible solutions.

“ We'd just been through an exercise reviewing our support to people who receive a few hours of support a week. The commissioners had reviewed every person and made significant cuts to their support. The Local Authority then placed a requirement that we provide very detailed information for each activity that we did with each person... We said no, much to the surprise of the commissioner.

Why? Because completing such paper work would use vast amounts of the time we should be supporting the person. It doesn't make sense!”

Project Participant

## About the programme:

We invited nine agencies to:

- **Work collaboratively with EIGHT other organisations** to build on the thinking started with John O'Brien in the Sept 2014 workshop
- **Challenge the risk averse culture** we operate in, and convert that dissatisfaction into practical and positive action
- **Learn how to nurture cultures** that concentrate on what staff could do rather than on what they must not do
- **Engage with regulators (CQC/CSSIW)** as an ally rather than a mythical adversary

## Participants: a diversity of managers

All participating organisations provide support for people with learning disabilities, some concentrating on people with mild or moderate disabilities while others work with people who have a broader range of requirements for support, including multiple and complex needs. Participants were mainly managers; some managed projects, several represented an organisation-wide portfolio responsibility such as quality or inclusion, three were chief executives (two co-directing the same organisation). Every organisation sent at least two people to the workshops, some fielded teams of three or more.

## Method: facilitating honest conversations

The programme consisted of five facilitated workshop days, plus webinars and visits to participating organisations by Paradigm consultants to provide support (4 days) with individual projects. Each organizational team was asked to identify a specific project that they wanted to work on during the 15-month programme. These projects were chosen to represent a current issue or concern, were to be at least potentially achievable during the time scale of the programme, were co-produced and could have the potential to leverage wider cultural change within the organisation.

Discussing progress in the workshops, with the support of a researcher acting as an external critical friend, enabled everyone to gain a deeper understanding of the issues and obstacles that are preventing people living a good, ordinary life. The thoughtful and reflective discussions allowed different perspectives and viewpoints to be heard which helped participants to shape their project. There were and are no quick fixes.

“ It was reassuring to have such honest conversations, inspiring to hear what others are doing. Challenging, yet exciting to shape new ideas for action.”

**Project Participant**

## Challenges: different projects, shared themes

Although there were individual differences in the projects chosen, they generally reflected one of three shared themes:

- **New ways of using technology** (such as electronic tablets, photography and specific functional software packages). Each of these was designed to facilitate greater involvement of the people being supported and their families in areas such as decision making, evidencing achievements, reclaiming their histories.
- **Redrafting operational policies so that they better reflect the organisation's values**, creating greater opportunities for the involvement of those affected by the policies and streamlined processes.
- **Revitalizing current services in the context of diminishing financial resources** by encouraging creativity and co-producing new solutions to everyday challenges.

## Change: both context and challenge

Paradoxically, running the programme itself was the source of major learning about the context and challenge of change. We learned that organisations are working under conditions of constant change.

During the fifteen months that the programme ran all of the participants found themselves managing significant change. One organisation expanded rapidly following the successful tendering for new contracts. Another lost tenders and had to retrench. As a result, both had to substantially reorganise their internal structures and systems. Another two organisations cut centrally managed, strategic quality and involvement teams, so several participants had to be redeployed to other roles. One participant was made redundant. Another participant had a long period of sick leave.

All these changes had an impact on the progress and achievements of the internal projects, but the participants recognised that constant turmoil and upheaval have become the 'new norm', the backdrop against which any organisational or service innovations have to be managed. In other words, the changes themselves were seen as pretty much 'business as usual'.

However, despite all the upheaval, participants from the majority of organisations attended all the workshops (although not always the same people each time). In follow-up interviews after the programme had ended, participants were very enthusiastic about how important the opportunity had been to come together on a regular basis, share experiences with others and to hear about how other organisations were approaching similar issues and challenges. Even the recognition that so many of these concerns were shared was beneficial.

In this paper there are suggestions of how we can all play our part in creating more positive cultures. These were developed during the workshops and the projects. Whilst workshop participants were largely staff from organisations the actions include those shared by others who were engaged with the projects namely: people with learning disabilities, families, commissioners and regulators.

“ It is good to talk to and think, with other organisations. There are some people that you gravitate towards, because you think they've got some really great ideas, and you can energise yourself through the debate.”

**Project Participant**

## Creating Innovations and Interventions for Change

The following details what each participating team decided to focus on during the project and beyond.

### Project 1 focus

Working alongside people we support, we will completely revamp our holiday policy. It's too bureaucratic and doesn't free people to be spontaneous.

### Project 2 focus

Working with our staff, and those we support (particularly those receiving a few hours support a week), we will work to reduce the focus on excessive paper work for inspections. Together we will create meaningful ways of recording.

### Project 3 focus

We will find a way of discovering more about the people we support by working with each person and their families, to create a way of capturing their stories in a meaningful way.

### Project 4 focus

Staff teams have little time to share, learn to influence practice. We will work with colleagues to design a way of connecting staff to unleash staff creativity.

### Project 5 focus

We will encourage the regular involvement of families through the development of an online resource.

### Project 6 focus

We will undertake a pilot project to review and co-produce a policy and procedure. This will lead to a clear way of co-producing all policies and procedures to support not limit people's lives.

### Project 7 focus

To ensure the personal communication styles of each person we support with complex needs are understood and respected we will work together to develop the Choice Pad project.

### Project 8 focus

Working in co-production we will design a way for the people we support to record and share with families and other supporters, what matters to them in their everyday lives – not only what the system thinks is important.

### Project 9 focus

To encourage all to think beyond 'service land' we will support all to discover community possibilities and identify what both individually and, we as an agency, can offer our community.

## What did we find out?

### Finding 1

Creating a positive culture means managing paradoxes

### Finding 2

Creating a positive culture means spending time on the things that really make a difference

### Finding 3

Creating a positive culture means ensuring that the values are integrated in everything we do

### Finding 4

Creating a positive culture means valuing support workers and enabling them to do the best job they can

### Finding 5

Creating and maintaining a positive culture requires courage!

## Creating a positive culture means managing paradoxes

“ We should be supporting people to make their own choices and decisions as much as possible and involving people fully in decision-making. The reality is, that over the past few years, risk has not been encouraged. If you 'get it wrong', you're slapped on the hand, you're across the front pages of the local news, the local authority comes down on you.”

### Project Participant

The most significant finding is that participants experience contradictory pressures, which create paradoxical tensions and dynamics. These include:

- Offering individualised, person centred services versus the pressures to standardise policies and practices;
- Encouraging learning through risk taking while minimizing risk;
- Managing reducing budgets and increasing expectations from commissioners, the people they support and their families
- Facilitating the development of supportive relationships in the lives of the people they work with, alongside systems and practices that remove individuality and are suspicious of what some perceive as relationships that push the standard professional boundaries.

Participants explained that such pressures often arise from tendering processes, which recast collaborators into competitors, the reluctance of commissioners to get involved in co-production because of fears of conflicts of interest, services being taken away from one provider and given to another with the concomitant disruption of relationships between workers and those being supported.

### What can we all do about it?

- Identify the things we do internally that don't make sense. Re-prioritise!
- Name it. Not doing anything means you are encouraging it.
- Find the courage to have those 'tough' conversations (with regulators, commissioners,) to avoid tensions between paradoxical situations.
- If you receive support and you are not happy with the way your support is offered KNOW you have the right (Care Act 2014), with the support of family and others if needed, to question and hold the professionals accountable to designing your support with you not simply in response to general organisational 'rules.'
- Engage with 'influential' people – councillors, trustees, decision makers, etc – so that they understand the impact of decisions they make and become supporters of people living a good ordinary life
- With every decision ask yourself 'Does this decision take us closer to, or further away from our stated values?'

“ Local authorities put so much effort into “we work in partnership” and yet they'll throw a tender at us and I'll think well, I'm not talking to you (another provider) at the moment about what I'm doing, because you're going for the same work that I'm going for. And all the work we do to ensure partnership working just falls away. We don't fall out, but we're never going to give our best selling points to somebody else.”

### Project Participant

# Creating a positive culture means spending time on the things that really make a difference.

That means resisting demands for ever more meetings and paperwork!

Staff (including managers!) often present a constant sense of busyness. One participant suggested this might be a response to shrinking resources and as a result *'Building intentional relationships becomes more difficult – where there is a bit of space we use it for blaming, being busy, being tired – are we telling ourselves stories that are making it harder to support people well?'*

If we are too 'busy' we may not pay attention to what people are experiencing, especially if it is painful. Spending time to see and feel how life is for a person, allowing ourselves to be touched, and being prepared to really listen to what people want, can create the most reliable source of motivation. But there was some evidence that staff discourage people they support from expressing strong or painful emotions because they (the staff) don't know how, or feel they don't have the time, to respond to them.

Feeling involved, listened to and that your contribution matters, are component parts of creating an enthused culture, where you feel part of something special, and are more inclined to go that extra mile. We need to make the time to stop, breathe and think.

We need to make the time to listen to and understand different perspectives. Supportive and cooperative cultures can emerge as people with differing positions and perspectives come

together to explore a situation and engage in thoughtful conversation.

**“** You can't manage quality from the office. You can't measure quality from forms. You can only measure quality by being with people, seeing how support workers are working, seeing what people are doing and how they are feeling. It's about being with people.”

**Project Participant**

## What can we ALL do about it?

- Be ruthless with your time. Make time to stop, think and reflect.
- Work with people supported, families, colleagues and others to review paper work. What purpose does it serve? For whom? Is it needed? How can it be improved?
- If you are in a position that typically means you have limited time with people supported and their families, MAKE
- TIME. Re-connect with why you do what you do. Keep your heart, mind and hands connected.
- Stay in contact with people and have many allies, increase their number. Engage. Involve. Inform.

# Creating a positive culture means ensuring that the values are integrated in everything we do, and to role model them throughout.

We need to be aware of the messages our actions and behaviours give others. Where is our focus? What do we pay attention to? Do our actions and words say the same things... or different things? Whatever managers say, if their behaviour isn't consistent with their words they will not be trusted. Is our focus on compliance with regulatory bodies, or is it about engaging in conversation when we disagree with their interpretation? Is it sometimes our interpretation and our tendency to play it safe that is the problem?

Do we really believe in inclusive communities? Panic and busyness can limit our thinking to 'service land' and we may miss the wonderful opportunities to be found in community. One agency focused their project on seeking ways for the people they supported to make a real contribution to their community.

“ *There's a lot of discussion in our town about what's needed so self advocates and supporters from our agency hosted a community meeting called 'A mighty conversation' focusing on people sharing their vision for their town. Ideas are now being put into action. So people with learning disabilities were key to driving local action.*”

### Project Participant

Do we really believe in co-production? The processes of engaging in conversation, design and action works best if people with learning disabilities, families, support staff, as well as

managers, commissioners and trustees are involved as co-thinkers. It's not always easy to find a way forward that satisfies the differing constraints on a person's capacity to live a good ordinary life, but honest discussions, and shared action on how to deal with the limitations that others see in a situation offer the best chance.

## What can we ALL do about it?

Listen to and capture the stories circulating in the organisation: do they make explicit the purpose, the values and what good practice is? If yes celebrate, if not, what needs to change?

- Actively encourage the continued contact and importance of family relationships for each person supported.
- Host formal and informal conversations, with all, about 'risk'. Do all engaged understand and accept that there will always be an element of risk in enabling people to live a good ordinary life? Are managers able to manage this? Agree and do, what needs to be done to free people from a potentially risk averse culture.
- If you see something in your organisation's policies and procedures that potentially hinders your work or works against the stated values, talk to your manager – your thoughts may lead to change!
- Keep moving towards the money being with each person in whatever way makes sense for them (personal budgets) not stuck in the system.

# Creating a positive culture means valuing support workers and enabling them to do the best job they can

People talked of the very sophisticated range of skills required by staff to establish relationships with each individual supported. These include very nuanced understandings of when, and how much support to provide, how to judge when someone has to develop the courage to take the risks which are inherent in learning new skills, and the capacity to just "be there". It was clear that many staff actually do possess these skills. But their terms and conditions, the internal messages, the policies and procedures and management messages with their agencies and perceived messages from regulators rarely, if ever, reflect this.

Participants told us about the frustration experienced by many support staff who often feel that their training and management restricts creativity and relationships that are truly person focused.

“ I say to people talking with support workers that your job is to have a relationship with the people that you support, to build and to form that relationship. The things that you do when you're here, like helping someone have a shower or a bath, going swimming, etc. is what you do, and its how you build the relationship, because you spend time hanging out with people meeting their family and friends. I'm not expecting you to just go swimming. It's not about getting into the water, getting wet, drying off and going back home. That's not what it is.”

### Project Participant

Staff need support with the skills of interpreting these values and translating them into actions, and managers need to be able to help them

work through the dilemmas and conflicts that are inevitably thrown up when negotiating the desires and aspirations of individuals within organisational constraints. They need to be regularly engaged in thoughtful debate about how to support people to have a good life.

“ In the past, people have got told off, people have felt that they've gotten in trouble for trying something... I think, there's got to be a no blame culture and we've got to move towards people actually being freer within their own roles.”

### Project Participant

## What can we ALL do about it?

If you supervise support workers check out your approach to supervision. Do you encourage reflection, shared learning? Do staff feel able to question and debate practice with you?

If you are a support worker you are likely to be the closest professional to the people you support and their families. Support them to have their voices heard in the organisation.

- If training has reduced as a result of budget cuts find other, creative ways of offering face to face learning opportunities, team meeting presentations, peer training etc.
- Host team meetings to encourage people to discuss concerns and create new approaches together.
- If you are a person who receives support or family member question any 'rules' that don't make sense to you.
- Teach people. Some 'do it' naturally, some need teaching. Talk about the subtleties of relationships.

# Creating and maintaining a positive culture requires courage!

Encouraging dissent, rewarding staff who take risks, challenging threats to delivering services in the best way we can – these actions require brave, bold leadership. Managers need to demonstrate confidence in their convictions, standing up for what they believe in.

“ We need people who will ask those awkward questions, saying: ‘Why are we doing this?’ ‘Have you thought about it?’ ‘What about so and so?’. As leaders we want some level of dissent to lead to creative conversations and new ways of doing and being.”

### Project Participant

Pressures and limited resources can lead people into normalizing poor practice; pretending things are okay when they are not. Although this may be well intended it is fundamentally disrespectful and signals a belief that the people being supported are somehow not deserving of our honesty. And this, as several participants acknowledged, is the beginning of a slippery slope that can lead to services becoming abusive.

Maintaining a positive culture requires constant vigilance. People don't set out to write meaningless, overly bureaucratic policies; a steady accretion of adaptations, additions, and responses to one or other regulator's demands creates something that is no longer what anyone chose or desired. The desire to ensure that people are protected from risk creates barriers to a fulfilling life that may be just as hard to escape as the locked doors of the wards in the old asylums. Small decisions to spare a person's feelings, postpone telling them a deeply valued staff member is leaving, an early bedtime is a good thing rather than a response to a reduced budget; none of these is necessarily the result of bad intentions. But the consequences are likely to have a significant negative impact on people's lives.

Conversation during the project highlighted the need to nourish experimental cultures, a learning culture, where we celebrate good

attempts. A thinking, questioning, curious culture rather than one where people feel the need to keep their heads down for fear of getting it wrong. Leaders must be present, bold and brave to support such cultures.

“ When you know it's the right thing to do. You shouldn't make excuses not to do it.”

### Project Participant

## What can we ALL do about it?

- It's not about tasks it's about relationships. Check the messages you give to all in relation to 'professional boundaries' – are policies and procedures stifling good relationships? What can you do to encourage relationships for great support?
- Ensure honest co-production. Opportunities for people supported and families to have real influence in the organisation and beyond
- There is no learning without some risk taking. How can you ensure this is understood by all?
- If you are being pulled in different directions you are likely to stay in the same place. Create space at team meetings etc. to encourage debate and agree new ways forward to free people

“ We want people to be supported to spot a holiday, decide to go and go. It seems so simple but the reality was that our policy and practice meant that approval had to be sought from a line of professionals (including Social Workers) before 'approval' would be given. As part of this project we have worked with staff and people supported to change this and it has changed.”

### Project participant

# A good ordinary life

## Solutions

Nurture support workers and their ability to respond to individuals as relationships evolve

Re-think your priorities. Connect with allies – engage, involve, inform

Explore your community. There are resources all around!

Let people know they are listened to, that their contribution matters. Involve all to create an enthused culture

If actions don't live the values don't pretend it's OK. Have those brave conversations and be a part of making change happen

A culture of blame, self-preservation and compliance

Systematic policies and procedures restricting people's lives

Cuts to funding leading to poor quality support

Struggles to respond in a constantly changing environment

People not making time to actively listen and act with people and families

## Barriers

# Conclusions: Implications for all of us

## 1. Relationships matter!

Relationships are at the heart of ordinary living and are crucial to service delivery. Policies and practices that ignore the importance of relationships will never deliver good quality services.

“ Relationships are what matters in life; when they're right everything else is more likely to be right.”

### Project Participant

Whether it be between support staff and people supported, between staff and family members, with Commissioning bodies or other external bodies, respectful, honest and empathetic relationships are essential.

Some social care organisations still promote a culture of 'distance' between staff and those they support via some mistaken belief that professionalism requires distance or an element of detachment. Developing relationships with the variety of people who have influence on people who require support to live good ordinary lives is equally important. When we spend time with people who have different roles and responsibilities, and take the time to understand each other and the differing pressures we face, more possibilities for a way forward are created.

Ensure people are freed from systems and approaches that limit, we need to develop productive partnerships by:

- Finding common ground, a place to start that allows a collaborative approach to various situations
- Creating visions and
- Supporting all to see and believe in new ways of doing.

## 2. Services are about more than just the basics of life

In a world of shrinking financial resources it's crucial that all of us, including senior policy makers, commissioners and regulators are pushing for more than just compliance focusing on safety and the basics of life. Everyone needs to aspire to provide good, ordinary lives for everyone. Ordinary, in terms of the freedoms

and expectations of all citizens.

We need to be aware of the messages our actions and behaviours give others. Where is our focus? What do we pay attention to? Do our actions and words say the same things... or different things? Whatever managers say, if their behaviour isn't consistent with their words they will not be trusted.

## 3. Take responsibility

It is very easy to blame everyone but ourselves. "The problem is Social Services/Support workers/ Management/Health/Adult Services/Finance and if only they'd get their act together and..." This approach might make us feel better in the short term by absolving us of any responsibility, but it generally achieves very little. When we spend time with people who have different roles and responsibilities, and take the time to understand each other and the differing pressures we face, more possibilities for a way forward are created.

Such thinking and action often requires a new conversation. In our *Healing Integrity Gaps* paper John O'Brien explains a framework for conversation, developed with participants, to focus on co-creating new ways of 'doing'.

This framework for conversation can shift conversations away from blame and towards designing a better way. REMEMBER involve a range of people, respect disagreement and work together to design a solution.

[Click here](#) to download the *Healing Integrity Gaps* paper

## 4. Working with the regulators (CQC/CSSIW/SCSWIS)

Values that are core to our work need constant articulation and evidencing throughout systems, policies and processes. Even if regulators appear to have overlooked some of the essentials, practitioners can evidence them, discuss them with inspectors and, when necessary, have brave conversations that can minimize the paradoxes. We can and must learn together. Regulators can play an important role in developing and encouraging values based monitoring, recognising and valuing diversity in the different ways they are manifested.

## 5. Policy makers need to concentrate on not creating needless obstacles

Anything that makes it more difficult to help people lead ordinary lives is a danger to their well-being. Evidence is important but excess requirements e.g. paper work that reduces the human contact time should be kept to a minimum.

Humans learn competence around hazards from trial and error. If managers want support staff to be less risk averse they need to value their ability to establish relationships, to reward them for taking risks, and, within reason, make it safe for them to fail. If managers need staff who have the skills to identify and nurture strengths of people supported then staff must be similarly supported.

## 6. Outcome based commissioning

The programme explored how to remove obstacles created within the system of health and social care. Expectations of commissioners were found to be particularly challenging in that they appeared to be a barrier to creative working and the outcomes that really matter. To encourage innovation we must be careful about what we measure! Develop new ways of working in co-production with statutory agencies, the voluntary sector, the community, people being supported. Co-creators must continue to develop outcomes that really matter, that lead to good ordinary lives.

To find out more about Paradigm see [paradigm-uk.org](http://paradigm-uk.org)



