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## **Case study: Using RCSLT's 5 Good Communication Standards to audit the communication environment and affect change 2015**

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Nottinghamshire NHS Foundation Trust.**

Working with patients who have a diagnosis of intellectual disability and co-occurring ASD and mental health.

### **Project initiation**

Jubilee Court is a supported living placement for people with ID and ASD run by private sector, Sun Healthcare.

Marie Fitzpatrick, Service Manager at Jubilee Court, could see an improved service being delivered by Jubilee Court if the [5 Good Communication Standards](#) were introduced. Marie has been in the care sector since 1978, is a qualified teacher and specialised in autism prior to taking up this post. She learnt about the "5 Good Communication Standards" from her daughter, a newly qualified SLT.

Sun Healthcare ring-fenced a small pot of money to invest in the development of a good communication environment at Jubilee Court, stipulating that any approach put in place/funded needed to be sustainable.

### **Project planning and implementation, April - October 2015**

Project planning commenced in late April 2015 with the project officially starting in June and ending in October 2015. In the planning stages, it was agreed that although Marie's original idea to introduce the "5 Good Communication Standards" was a good one, it was only the start. In order to maintain the good communication environment, communication champions needed to be trained.

Stakeholders were identified as Sun Healthcare, the IDD SLT Service and Jubilee Court staff and residents – everyone who would gain from an improved service.

## Aims

The overarching aims, which spanned the whole of the project period, were agreed with all the stakeholders. Success required a whole service approach to bring about change to the organisation's ethos: input and support was required from all stakeholders, ie. Sun Healthcare, the senior team at Jubilee Court, the communication champions, the IDD SLT Service and specialist SLT Katie Burgess.

If all invested parties understand the vision of a "good communication environment" they can work together to ensure that time and resources are available for this to come to fruition.

- To establish and train at least two communication champions who, by the end of the project are able to consider the communication environment at Jubilee Court and positively influence this on an individualised basis and at service level. This can be increased to four if staff are identified and willing to be involved.

Communication champions volunteered their services and applications were vetted by the service manager, who used her knowledge of staff to establish whether they had the necessary skills to work on the project. It was agreed that this would be a skill development role for the health care assistant who did not currently have team leadership responsibilities.

- To introduce the "5 Good Communication Standards" to the champions through the use of RCSLT documentation, poster and full document, giving them contextual information regarding the [Winterbourne view](#) and using real time examples of good practice in accordance with the standard.
- Create an easy to use pro forma and step by step guide for producing easy read information. As part of this piece of work explore the current and possible future image/symbol software packages.
- Support the whole staff team at Jubilee Court to develop a basic awareness of what makes a good communication environment.
- Increase the Jubilee Court staff teams awareness of the "5 Good Communication Standards" (5GCS), supporting the senior team and communication champions to use these principles to underpin good practice.
- Raise the whole staff teams awareness of what good communication looks like with the IDD population focusing on how communication links to:
  - behaviour, mood, anxiety levels
  - meaningful contributions to care & decision making
  - quality of life.

This process should present opportunities to provide staff with the requisite skills to adapt their communication style to meet the needs of the Jubilee Court client population.

- Complete two pieces of client specific work with full support and input from the communication champions. This should ensure that communication champions develop skills to influence clients directly as well as managing the comm. environment.

All of the aims were achieved during the project.

## **Outcomes - project achievements**

### **Resource development**

A range of resources were created as part of the project, including:

- **communication guideline templates**  
allowed communication champions to create individualised communication guidelines for each resident, summarising the person's profile of communication strengths and needs and providing all staff with access to "top tips" regarding the best way to communicate with the individual.
- **assessment tool**  
allows staff to gather data about a client's communication strengths and needs and informs the communication guidelines.
- **communication care plan template**
- **top tip/how to sheets**  
allowed communication champions to support and to use a range of communication tools such as accessible information, Talking Mats approach and Social Stories.

A resource library was also created in paper format and is accessible in the communication champions file. The file includes information about the "5 Good Communication Standards", good practice examples of work, advice sheets etc. Staff have used this file to support their workshops and training sessions. They have also used it when developing their own skills independent of SLT support.

### **Capacity and capability - Jubilee Court staff team**

A third of project time was dedicated to developing the capacity and capability of the wider staff team at Jubilee Court, not just the communication champions. This was done through:

- the delivery of direct training
- workshops
- a regular awareness raising slot at the monthly team meetings
- modelling in practice.

The intention is that all of the above will continue to be delivered by the communication champions in the future. This will take into account, staff changes and the needs for knowledge refreshers.

### **Communication champions – skills development**

The final two thirds of the project were taken up on improving the skills of the communication champions, the project started with four champions however one changed jobs during the project and it ended with three. This was done through:

- training
- modelling

- workshops
- discussion sessions
- self-directed learning
- skills practice.

The communication champions ended the project with:

- an improved awareness of the 5GCS
- skills to create easy read information and utilise a range of communication tools such as Social Stories and Talking Mats
- ability to begin recognising and considering clients speech, language and communication needs.

## **Project benefits**

The listed benefits have been agreed by all those staffs involved in the project, with discussions being led by the communication champions who have been integral to the project and its success.

The benefits were fed back to the senior Sun Healthcare team during the final presentation in October 2015.

- Improved the complete communication environment at Jubilee Court for staff and residents.
- Improved staff awareness of what “good communication” looks like in practice. This has supported the improvement of staff skills.
- The project has put Jubilee Court and Sun Healthcare “ahead of the game” in terms of implementing the “5 Good Communication Standards”, especially if they become CQC inspection criteria in the future.
- Developed specialist skills and roles with the Jubilee Court staff team; communication champions have grown out of a small group of dedicated support staff.
- Improved the team’s knowledge of two residents and their communication strengths and needs, thus improving the quality of care they receive from Sun Healthcare. There was also direct client work completed for a third resident and overall skill development has positively improved care for the general population at Jubilee Court.
- Given Sun Healthcare a really invaluable resource, access to trained communication champions
- Puts communication at the centre of best practice at Jubilee Court.
- Sun Healthcare’s directors were very positive about the projects aims and achieved outcomes, they are hoping to use the skills of the communication champions across their other ID/ASD services by having them as visiting speakers on their induction training dates and staff development days. The possibility of new projects across their other services has also been tentatively discussed.

Communication champions gave feedback at the end of the project:

“I’ve had the opportunity to be involved in this project and learn new skills....wasn’t sure that I could even learn new skills.”

“Becoming more confident in (using) the 5GCS. And in giving presentations – I understood the project.”

## **Project Audit – 5 Good Communication Standards**

The completion of a baseline audit allowed us to set goals for the six month period of the project.

Items were scored:

- Red (absent)
- Amber (in progress/happening intermittently)
- Green (happening consistently).

At the time there were **x red** scores. The audit tool was created by the Intellectual Disability SLT Service in Nottinghamshire.

At the outset of the project, three audits were completed by:

- Katie Burgess
- four communication champions
- Jubilee Courts management team.

Results were compared and collated onto one form. Where scored items did not match across the three documents, the most common score was selected, e.g. x2 ambers out of three score sheets = amber on the collated form. There were no occasions where opinions differed greatly, e.g. x1 amber, x1 red and x1 green for the same audit items over the three sheets. The process recurred at the end of the project and the collated forms were compared.

All goals all were achieved with those red audit items reaching the status of amber - in progress, or green - complete in the October review.

All audit items scored in the final document were either amber or green. Therefore no audit items were “absent” by the end of the project. This is a marked improvement from June 2015 when the project commenced.

This outcome suggests that Jubilee Court is making good progress towards being a service that acts in accordance with the “5 Good Communication Standards”, creating a communication friendly and accessible environment for people with intellectual disabilities and Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). The staff team at Jubilee Court have access to the audit sheets used as part of the project and could re-audit their service as required.

## **Challenges**

The following challenges were encountered. However all were overcome in some capacity as outlined below.

- **Freeing communication champions from their daily duties**  
Marie Fitzpatrick managed this by carefully planning staff rotas to ensure ensuring that at least one or two communication champions could be out of the staff rotas for a period of time during each project day. Careful rotation of the champions was necessary, though not always achieved. However all champions reported feeling that they had adequate opportunities to engage with as much of the project as they wanted overall. It is hoped that this protected time will continue to be offered at regular intervals, however discussions need to take place regarding balancing the needs of residents with the needs of the service.
- **Engaging home staff in the process of change**  
This was difficult as many staff were very experienced and used to working in a particular way. We approached change through:
  - workshops as opposed to “direct teaching sessions”
  - using a consultative approach with them by finding out what they would like to see changed as opposed to dictating change
  - discussing change and introducing it gradually and in consultation with management to ensure messages were consistent.
  - making it clear that change was about improving care and making their jobs easier not harder.
- **Measuring change that could be directly attributed to the project work**  
The “5 Good Communications Standards” audit tool was used at the project start, mid-point and end to measure change. This has been created locally and is based on the measurable elements of the “5 Good Communications. Standards”.

“Recently we had a CQC inspection and I was able to show them the work and talk about the 5GCS, this went down really well. We are also promoting the project with our autism accreditation standards.” Marie Fitzpatrick, Service Manager

### **Justification for use of valuable SLT provision**

Managing a busy clinical caseload alongside the project was also a challenge.

Considerable support was offered from the SLT leadership team and colleagues who distributed a small proportion of my caseload between them allowing me to free up the equivalent of ½ a days clinic time per week to dedicate to the project.

Although this could be considered to be a disproportionate use of valuable SLT provision - by addressing the needs of a single service - the SLT leadership team could recognise that such innovative practice would have a much wider benefit.

### **Benefits**

- By developing the capacity and capability of the Jubilee Court staff, they are now able to address some of the day to day speech, language and communication needs of the population they work with. It was hypothesised that improving the care and treatment people receive on a day to day basis would benefit residents quality of life and general wellbeing, avoiding some unnecessary communication breakdowns and thus the risks associate with these e.g. frustration, unmet needs, challenging behaviour, isolation etc.

- Since the project's completion, any referrals from this service to the SLT team have been well informed and based on needing support from a specialist provision once all other options have been explored.
- These referrals have also had a skilled communication champion attached to them and as a result, the episode of care has progressed more smoothly and some may say, more successfully.
- The initiative allowed the SLT service to think of alternative ways of working when a group of referrals come in from a single residential home. This means still addressing residents needs over the same time frame but broadening the scope of an episode of care in a way that should proactively manage future referrals.
- It is an invaluable opportunity to promote the "5 Good Communication Standards".
- This type of work develops the SLT service's reputation for being flexible, innovative and responsive to population needs, leading change in an every changing NHS and doing "more" with the resources we have access to.

### **Service feedback**

"The project showed just how trusting, flexible and supportive both SALT and Jubilee Court were in coming together to make this project work...As a result, champions felt more confident as they learnt about all the different types of communication, and they now feel they can respond to questions about different styles that can help service users."

**Marie Fitzpatrick; Service Manager**

### **Further information**

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