

Training for personal assistants about neurodevelopmental conditions

Organisation name: Embrace Wigan and Leigh

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ULO funding 2018/19

Embrace Wigan and Leigh used funding from Skills for Care to develop three training sessions for personal assistants (PAs) around supporting people with neurodevelopmental conditions who display, or are at risk of displaying, behaviours which challenge.

Aims

Embrace found that PAs struggled to find local training, both when they first started the role and for ongoing learning and development.

In particular, PAs said they needed more support and training around working with people who display behaviours which challenge.

The project

Embrace co-produced a series of training sessions for PAs to improve their understanding of conditions and triggers which can affect behaviour, and strategies to support people who display behaviours which challenge.

PAs could attend any of the three sessions and didn't have to commit to attending all three: however most PAs chose to attend all three.

Session 1: understanding neurodevelopment

This session included:

- an introduction to neurodevelopmental conditions
- how these conditions can impact someone's behaviour.

They found that often the learners knew the names of conditions but didn't know anything else about it and they felt uncomfortable to ask their employer or family members about it. Family members also reported that they found it difficult to explain their relative's condition to other people.

This session addressed some of these challenges and provided a safe space for an open discussion.

Session 2: understanding sensory processing

Originally, Embrace planned to provide training about communication, however they found that there was low take up for this course. This was because PAs didn't understand the link between communication and people's behaviour, and presumed that the session was about communicating with people who didn't use spoken word.

PAs who did do the previous communication training were enthusiastic about learning more about sensory processing, and so they decided to run a session on this.

This session explained how different people process sensory information and what effect this can have on their day to day life. They asked PAs to share their own experiences in the session, reflect on their own practice and think about ways to improve.

Session 3: understanding behaviours which challenge

This session helped PAs to understand how they could put their learning from sessions 1 and 2 into practice.

It taught them a range of strategies to support people who display behaviours which challenge, and challenged them to think about how they could use these strategies, in a person-centred way, with their employers.

Embrace promoted the training to PAs through their PA network and Facebook page.

They added a charge of £5 for PAs to try and reduce the number of people who didn't show up to training, and they communicated with delegates regularly to remind them about the training.

This worked well and only two people didn't turn up across all sessions. They found that having more people in the sessions made them more interactive and engaging.

The outcome

Participants said that the training session helped them to develop their understanding of neurodevelopmental conditions and how to support people who display behaviours which challenge.

PAs found it useful to attend the session with their employer and family members, so they could discuss their learning as a team.

For example, one team of PAs attended all three sessions alongside a family member of their employer who was autistic and displayed behaviours that they found challenging.

The family member felt that the courses had explained her relative in a way she had been unable to articulate herself, and she also developed her knowledge from the

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sessions. The PAs said that they had found a range of new, person-centred strategies and felt more confident to support their employer

The training has enabled PAs to make real changes with their employers, to improve their care and support. One learner said:

“The third session was particularly beneficial for me as it equipped me with many more strategies to try with the young lady I support. Through attending this course our team have been working on introducing a visual timetable and a ‘calm pack’.

My employer’s relative booked onto the course too, and we were able to ask the trainer questions that were specific to the individual that we support.

Over the last few months there have been occasions whereby I have amended my response to behaviours based on what Sue taught us during the courses. Changing the ‘direct’ approach to a more ‘well, I’m going to be doing this, I’d love it if you wanted to help me’ approach.

The fact that the courses have been repeated has meant that others in my team have been able to access them too.”

More information

If you’re a user led organisation, you can apply for funding to deliver and/or commission training for individual employers and PAs. It’s distributed annually, subject to funding from the Department of Health and Social Care. [Sign up to our quarterly newsletter](#) to keep up to date.

Individual employers can apply for funding to pay for training for themselves and their PAs. The funding can pay for a range of courses and qualifications, and cover travel costs and the cost of a replacement PA. [Find out more here](#).