



Activ8

End-point feedback report by the University of Bristol

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Key learning points: How social work practice is developing at Activ8

1. Cre8

Cre8 started in the middle of August when the first member of staff was employed; it officially started fully staffed on 14 September 2012. Cre8 consists of three employees: a community assessment and referral officer, an occupational therapist (OT) and a community support worker. Cre8 is a newly developed service within Activ8 and acts as the front-end service for service users.* The design and vision of Cre8 was developed with input from the Activ8 staff who pushed for a strong OT presence. Cre8 becomes involved with service users assessed as low to moderate needs, although it is also referred cases (on a case-by-case basis) where there is a higher need. Cre8 staff have a strong skill base in OT and community work/community resources. The OT presence and expertise was sought in order to compliment the social work services and to assess service users with a preventative focus as opposed to a reactive crisis focus. Cre8 is able to conduct low-level assessments and provide low-level (OT) equipment. It aims to mobilise and reable service users by acknowledging and pulling out strengths and resources within the service user, his/her family and social support and the community. It aims to challenge a focus on what service users can't do and to focus more on what they can do. Cre8 aims to keep service users as independent as possible and to reduce the 'revolving door' syndrome where service users come back for services in a time of crisis, get a service to elevate the crisis, but never actually address the underlying problem or concern. One way in which Cre8 is able to do this is by teaching new skills (see below). These can help to reduce the care package by enabling people to do things themselves. The use of OT knowledge, skills and equipment is one way in which to teach people to do things for themselves. Because Cre8 is a new service, it is still in the development stages, and the formal eligibility criteria and assessment form for services are being formalised by Cre8 with input from Activ8. Specific activities that Cre8 has initiated include the following:

Group work and 'd/Deaf awareness for beginners' workshops. Activ8 and Cre8 work with individuals with physical disabilities (PD) with one difficulty often being hand strength and dexterity. Service users might be encouraged to use a stress ball to exercise their hands and increase dexterity. Service users have also highlighted to the Cre8 staff that there is a lack of social contact for people with PD within Birmingham. They have expressed a desire to expand the world of disability and one way in which to do this is by increasing communication skills between people, especially between the d/Deaf and hearing communities. Lynda

(working in Cre8) has therefore devised a 'd/Deaf awareness for beginners' workshop where people with PD can learn British Sign Language (BSL). This enables service users to improve their communication skills, and also serves as an exercise and opportunity to increase hand strength and dexterity. The service users learn a new life skill – improving dexterity and strength while increasing social contact and support. The group could serve as a peer support group and enable service users to have more access to Cre8 staff.

PD volunteers. Cre8 is seeking to develop a bank of volunteers with PD who can assist in enhancing the Cre8 service. One possible idea is having the volunteers come into the office and work on the computer in order to update resource packs.

Clear theoretical and methodological approach. Cre8 employees are clear of their aims and approach to reach the aims. They state that they use cognitive behavioural therapy in order to challenge negative thoughts and to move service users towards seeing what they can do – to remove the focus on what a service user can't do to what a service user can do with support and equipment. The team acknowledges that this way of working requires assessments over time and not just a one-off assessment. The staff state they need time to THINK and bounce ideas off of one another. This clear aim, assessment and time will enable service users to gain services quicker that more appropriately meet their needs. The ultimate aim is to implement an intervention that is sustainable.

Observe that person in their natural environment. As stated above, Cre8 aims to conduct a holistic assessment where it doesn't just take in the information on the surface, but rather 'drills down, makes an appraisal and then backfills it'. Cre8 does not aim to merely throw care at someone. For example, if someone was assessed as not being able to reach down to put on their shoes, Cre8 would advocate NOT to put in a carer to help the service user get dressed, but to assess the whole situation to determine if there was some support or equipment that could enable the service user to do this themselves. Cre8 aims to build up a complete picture as opposed to just looking at the individual, by talking to others involved and looking at what is really going on. If Cre8 suggests a piece of equipment, then it will go back and evaluate the equipment; if it isn't successful, it will try something new. Cre8 is looking for longer-term solutions rather than quick fixes.

The following case illustrates the work of Cre8.

Helping mother and baby stay home

The service user, Ms D, reports that she had made an enquiry from her midwife when she was three months pregnant to find out if there was any support available for disabled parents. Following this a multi-disciplinary team meeting was held without the service user knowing. Her GP was invited but refused to attend to demonstrate his objections. Ms D was invited to the following meeting and there was the midwife, social worker from Children and Families and other professionals who voiced their concern about her ability to care for the baby when it was born.

Ms D was upset as she was told she would have to admit the social worker to check on her progress on a regular basis and they were considering the removal of her baby once born OR placing her in an institution for mothers and babies. An occupational therapist (OT) and social worker was assigned from Adults and Communities. There was a difference in their information/observations of Ms D. They recommended a home move and a 24-hour carer to be put in place within her home to support the care of Ms D and her baby when born and a move to another property. The OT had checked a list of supportive equipment required by Ms D to care for her baby.

Due to the discrepancies between the information/observations of the service user and OT and the Activ8 social worker, there was a challenge in networking and negotiating with Children and Families. Ms D, now 8½ months pregnant, had received no support, no plan and felt things were spiralling out of control. She had been threatened with the removal of her child once born at hospital, and felt under great strain. I found little or conflicting information about this case using the systems, and therefore undertook a new assessment.

The Children and Families social worker met me at Ms D's address and I voiced my concerns about assumptions being made about disabled people being inadequate parents. I identified that although a list had been made four months previously and checked by an OT, that nothing had been put in place to support Ms D. The Children and Families social worker requested that I check the list again.

Cre8 – overview of work completed to date:

- Checked with the social worker about the suitability of the facilities of the institutional unit they were recommending – suitability for a disabled mother? Informed them of the risks of early separation of mother/child and should support not be given for community? Explained to service user that my assessment may have the same result as previous assessor or be very different.
- Advised Activ8 social worker that 24-hour live-in carer was not required, but equipment and contact with the service user was essential.
- Identified equipment to enable Ms D; referred for settee raisers to ease transfers; sent recommendations for baby equipment to Child and

- Gave enablement advice regarding the parenting role and physical movement management of loads for Ms D's safety and baby.
- Chased housing application for suitable home environment.
- Chased application to child support Svs centres – found application sent from Child and Families social worker not received – generated and completed new form with service user and sent – highlighting need for conductive education classes, information on mental health and physical disability support.
- Cot Assm with service user and company rep, price comparison.
- Identified possible charitable sources of funding; applied to Loxton Trust for £3,000 cot; applied to ACT for £3,000 cot; applied to Baron Davenport for Argos videocam and baby changing bench.
- Chased referral to Supporting People team to enable Ms D long-term community support.
- Offered to undertake joint visit with Birmingham City Council Housing – declined.
- Challenged housing decision to provide less points for a move when I discovered inaccuracies in their report and in process of making an appeal.
- Undertook joint visit with Supporting People team to assess for Supporting People applications.
- Undertook introduction visit with Supporting People worker when allocated to support Ms D's telling of her story.

The difference being made to the service user has been:

Ms D received advice about lifting the baby, equipment she would need to support her caring for her baby and that would support her disabilities. She received some simple equipment, support with arranging a company representative to visit her home and to trial an electrically operated rise/fall cot, which would aid with the care of the baby up to four years old.

Ms D advised that she had problems with the housing OT with getting her points across, and felt that she had not been listened to with regards to her housing needs. As Cre8 is involved, she feels supported with her appeal to housing. Ms D relates well to the Supporting People worker and is building a rapport, enabling her to access community services. Ms D has splints on her arms and has appreciated the assistance with form filling and chasing other agencies.

Ms D is happy she does not have a 24-hour live-in carer as she wants to undertake the care of her own daughter herself. The midwife at the hospital was pleased with her progress and Ms D was able to keep her daughter. The baby is 15 weeks old and appears to be very happy and healthy. The cost saving to Birmingham City Council care is £31,500.

Ms D described my skills as follows: "a kind, caring, supportive, softly spoken force to be reckoned with!"

2.

Peer-to-Peer Group

The Peer-to-Peer Group is a pioneer project funded by Birmingham City Council and the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE). The group aims to bring service users together to share experiences and expertise, such as how to use and manage direct payments. Its aim is to build and develop a network that can possibly reduce isolation, focus on strengths and increase independence. This group works alongside Activ8 where some of the social workers are involved in running it, and Cre8 and Activ8 staff are actively involved in recruiting volunteers and participants to the group. The group also provides an opportunity for peers to act as volunteers for Activ8 (future developments), where they can assist with day-to-day activities for service users or conduct research for Activ8 to update resource packs (they currently have three potential volunteers).

3. Activ8 Angels

The values of social enterprise are evidenced through Activ8 Angels. Staff realised that some service users were not receiving the care that they needed because paid carers refused to go into dirty homes. The usual response to such issues would be to pay for professional cleaners, which could cost up to £300. Instead of spending the budget to pay for these services, the staff volunteered their time (outside of office hours) to deliver the service. Activ8 Angels work with the service user to tidy up the home so that carers can go in. This is not an advertised service, but has been implemented when needed, and has saved hundreds of pounds. These volunteer activities have enhanced the morale of the team. Staff have also donated unwanted items, such as clothing for service users or curtains when a service user moves house.

The following cases illustrate the work of Activ8 Angels.

'Carers went in two days later'

A service user was in hospital awaiting discharge. A care agency had been identified but could not agree to start the care package until the ground area had been cleared of items that had accumulated. This clutter would cause problems as her bed had to be downstairs and carers needed sufficient space to hoist her and tend her needs.

As her husband was also in a wheelchair and unable to do the decluttering, four of us went in and did a 'blitz' of the downstairs area, clearing out plastic bags full of rubbish and cleaning the kitchen area so that carers could start going in, which they did, two days later.

'More space for her to move around'

I did a six-week review of a service user following her discharge from hospital after having her leg amputated at the knee. She was unable to go back to her rented flat as it was no longer suitable for her to access with a wheelchair, so she was placed in a self-contained flat in sheltered housing.

Most of her furniture and belongings were unsuitably placed within the flat, causing problems for her in manoeuvring. A few of us went out to assess the situation and to see what we could do to help her.

We identified that some of the furniture in the lounge needed to be moved so that there would be much more space for her to move around.

In the bedroom area the bed was placed against the wall. Now she no longer had a carer going in, she was unable to make the bed in this position. We moved the bed so it was central in the room, with the headboard against the wall, so she was able to move around the bed and to make it.

Clothing had been 'thrown' into the wardrobe so we rearranged it so that her clothes were easily accessible; we put them into piles according to the season and stored them at a level that was easy for her to reach.

She was having her bathroom converted into a wet room and we were asked by her support worker if we would fund respite for her for the two weeks while the work was being done.

I spoke to the residential caretaker and asked if there were any vacant flats that she could move into. The only flat he said was available only had a single bed and he felt that it might not be suitable for her.

We viewed the flat and suggested that as she needed a double bed, whether we could swap the beds over. It was agreed, and she will be moving into the temporary flat soon.

I think we have probably saved well over £1,200 in respite care.

4. Have the freedom and power to make decisions/flatter management structure

Activ8 staff report greater freedom in their practice and more power in making decisions. There are less processes and procedures within Activ8 than within Birmingham City Council. The social workers within Activ8 are able to conduct an assessment, calculate the budget (using the resource allocation system [RAS]), have a budget approved and funding in place in a much quicker timescale. The manager, Carole Fry-Smith, approves the budget, having received the funding request from the social worker. Activ8 has developed a budget template that serves as the assessment for the requested budget. If the budget is within RAS, then Carole can approve, or not. Activ8 has managed to not instil a funding panel as it sees it as a delaying tactic – budgets are currently approved much quicker and service users are able to have a package of care much sooner (within days as opposed to months). If the budget is over RAS, then the request needs to go to to agree. There are usually time scales on these packages because it might be that more money is needed upfront in order to serve as a preventative measure and will therefore reduce the need for care in the future. Activ8 has a motto of ‘spend to save’ – ‘spend in the first instance so we don’t have to do crisis work all the time ... let’s prevent something from getting worse.’

The budget template ensures consistency and standards. It consists of the following:

Budget template

Pen picture:

- Who is this service user?
- Current situation/issues
- Current support e.g. ILF, POC, family district nurse
- What are the current unmet needs?
- What are the risks if needs remain unmet/not funded?
- How is DLA being used to support POC?

Confirm that you have considered (include date of referral):

- Tunstall/Telecare
- Big society (network)
- Support work
- Cre8 (where appropriate)
- Other funding sources
- Other relevant referrals
- Is a referral to CHC required/appropriate?

And finally:

- RAS
- Current POC (commitment)
- Budget or increase required and for how long (if known)
- New weekly total
- Savings (if known)
- Any innovation

Staff are involved in the allocation of cases. There is an allocation meeting once a week and staff come and discuss the cases and current capacity to take on new cases. This provides an opportunity to take on a case because it might be interesting or might fit a person's particular expertise. This has had a reported impact by reducing stress levels. As stated under point 1 above, Activ8 staff have been involved in shaping the Cre8 service – the staff suggested having an OT to meet the needs of service users immediately and to prevent some social work involvement or services.

5. Teambuilding and cohesion

Activ8 held a staff teambuilding away day. The staff were tasked with exploring where they are now, what they are going to do, what they are doing differently and what they are going to do in the future. They created a video that highlighted these main themes.

Staff are also involved in shared learning within team meetings. They are encouraged or asked to speak of a piece of good work that can be shared with the team. Two members of staff are involved in putting together a staff newsletter that is sent out to staff every two months or every quarter. Carole has purchased and displayed an 'appreciation tree' where staff can leave a note to another staff member giving a 'thank you' for any piece of work or act. These activities are reported to make the staff feel more empowered.

How are the values of social enterprise being evidenced at Activ8?

The following list was compiled through communication with the staff at Activ8:

1. Community involvement and servicing the community. This has been achieved particularly through Active8 Angels (see above). This is a service that has been going since November 2012 and includes at least two workers, in agreement with the service user, addressing a community need (e.g. cleaning a service user's home, attending to shopping, dealing with any issues that might prohibit a carer from entering a home). Activ8 ensures a disclaimer of damaged goods and all workers need to have a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. Staff also donate unwanted items to service users, such as clothes and curtains.
2. Volunteer service. Activ8 is seeking to recruit a base of volunteers to assist with the Activ8 Angels as well as other activities.
3. Appreciating and valuing staff. Activ8 is seeking to increase the participation and appreciation of the staff team by planting an 'appreciation tree' in the building. This tree will enable all staff to document when someone has done good work that has benefited either another worker, a service user or the team. This is to acknowledge good work and to foster a good morale within the team. The staff report feeling more valued and, because of this, they feel more motivated.
4. The staff report a stronger voice. Although they may not always be able to create immediate change, they feel as if they have a voice. They believe they have the opportunity to challenge things, although they realise this may not always lead to immediate change.
5. Staff are able to be more creative and involved in business development. They are able to think about the services that they provide and how they can provide them differently. They are able to think about business development opportunities (e.g. assistive technology equipment).
6. There are limits on the extent to which Activ8 can embed the values of social enterprise into the SWP. These limits are due to blocks within Birmingham City Council. Although there is a flatter structure within Activ8 and less power imbalance, there is a sense and practice of Birmingham City Council having the ultimate say over resources and some policies and procedures. For example, staff are employed by the council so they are under the council's employment terms and conditions, which limits what BID and Activ8 can do. Staff have to be appraised according to council appraisal/performance criteria without much flexibility – there is little to no say in the selection of challenging objectives. And if additional resources are needed, such as admin staff, Activ8 has to go back to the council for approval. The council has to approve IT systems and access and this can take months to implement.

* This is the term used by Activ8 for the people who use their services.

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