



## TOPAZ

End-point feedback report by the University of Bristol

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### Key learning points: How Social Work Practice has developed at TOPAZ

#### 1. Preventative work

One of TOPAZ's main aims is to provide a preventative service. TOPAZ delivers preventative work through the following roles, which are also discussed on its website ([www.topaz.uk.net](http://www.topaz.uk.net)):

**Telephone reviews.** TOPAZ is responsible for conducting reviews for people assessed at low or moderate need who aren't receiving a service from the local authority. The reviews take place by telephone and TOPAZ is able to assess and give information and advice or signpost the individuals to community services that they might be interested in pursuing. The reviews enable the social workers to pick up on issues early, with the aim of preventing deterioration in need. For example, by referring to a community service, an individual's mobility could be enhanced by getting out of the house, her/his mental state could be improved by meeting people or by addressing potentially stressful issues, such as benefits. The review asks questions about how they are coping, how they transfer within the home (getting in and out of the bath or bed), if they are able to cook, if they receive any help from family, if there is any occupational therapy (OT) equipment that might be necessary for daily living, etc. Any identified difficulties are then addressed by providing information and advice or by referring to other services. For example, problems with shopping could result in giving the person using the service a list of online shopping or information on how to get in touch with the local supermarket's bus. If there are problems with finances, then there could be a referral to 'Every Pound Counts', a free service that reviews an individual's finances and performs benefits and tax checks. If someone has been suggested OT equipment, they can be referred to the Handyperson Service (Age UK), which sends a handyperson to the home to install equipment for free or to fix a particular problem. If they assess that the need has changed, then TOPAZ refers to the local authority for a new, full assessment.

Reviews also serve as an opportunity to identify any safeguarding issues, which are then referred back to the local authority. Many of the safeguarding issues are in relation to anti-social behaviour. In addition to contacting the

local authority, TOPAZ workers may also contact the safer neighbourhoods teams and the Vulnerable Victims Case Conference, which provides a coordinated response by allocating a lead person to pull together all services, such as housing and the police, and then meeting on a monthly basis.

The following case study illustrates the review process:

### **Providing information and advice**

I completed a telephone review with Mrs June\* on behalf of Mrs May (her daughter).

Mrs May is 85 years old and lives with her daughter in her own home. Mrs June stated that Mrs May gets around with a white cane and a walking stick. She explained that Mrs May has macular degeneration in both eyes. She reported that Mrs May is registered blind.

During the review, Mrs June reported that Mrs May was becoming increasingly forgetful. She stated that they were waiting for a brain scan to be completed. Mrs June stated that she feels that her mother has dementia, although it has not been diagnosed. Mrs June reported that Mrs May has started to hallucinate. She stated that she has started to sleep in the same bed with her as she will often get up several times in the night. Following this information I advised that I would send information about dementia and Alzheimer's.

Mrs June stated that she prepares meals, as she has noticed that Mrs May puts bread in the toaster and walks away, and forgets that she has done so.

Mrs June stated that Mrs May does not know why she is taking medication. She reported that she prompts her to take her medication and assists her with her eye drops. Mrs June explained that she also collects her medication from the pharmacy.

Mrs June stated that Mrs May is occasionally incontinent. She stated that this generally happens during the night. I advised that I would send her information about the Bladder and Bowel Clinic.

Mrs June stated that Mrs May is housebound. She stated that she has limited mobility and does not engage in any social activities. Mrs June stated that it might be nice for Mrs May to attend a social group or club, which would also provide respite for Mrs June. I advised that I would send information about the Alzheimer's Society and social groups and clubs in her area. The Alzheimer's Society provides groups for both clients and their carers. I also advised that I would send information about the Fix Yourself A Break (FYAB) scheme. FYAB aims to help carers who need support.

Mrs June stated that Mrs May is unable to use public transport. She reported that she only uses the transport provided by the hospital. It was identified that Mrs May would benefit from a taxi card so that they can travel at a discounted rate.

During the review, Mrs June stated that her husband died three years ago – she stated that she had not got over this and felt as if she was losing her mother as well. I advised that I would send her information about counselling services.

Mrs June stated that she was pleased that she had received a call from TOPAZ as it offered her a chance to talk about her situation. She added that she looked forward to receiving the information.

**Residential home, community and faith-based surgeries.** TOPAZ workers visit residential homes to talk to self-funders and to provide information and advice, in order to promote health and well-being and to prevent deterioration in need – to identify issues before they become a crisis. TOPAZ is also able to pick up on safeguarding issues during such visits, which are then referred to the local authority. Relationships within communities have been developed by workers going into the community groups and talking about various aspects that might be beneficial to them. This hasn't been an easy task, as some groups are sceptical of social workers and are not open to having advice or support from social workers. Beverly has been able to work with the Somali community by going in and listening to their specific needs, which predominately stemmed from housing issues. She was then able to hold a surgery where she brought in a housing adviser (and interpreters) to speak to the community members. Now the community are advertising TOPAZ's service. Community surgeries are held in a flexible way to best meet the needs and commitment of the community. A surgery was held at a school so that when parents were dropping off their children, they could come in and see the workers – there were interpreters, refreshments and housing and benefits officers present. Another surgery was held in the park for Latin American women who had experienced domestic violence. The park was chosen because the women had their children with them and they needed a place to meet that was child-friendly.

**Advocacy work.** An underlying theme throughout TOPAZ's work is that of advocacy. The workers are able to advise people of their rights. Self-funders are often left to fall through the cracks because they don't meet certain criteria. TOPAZ is able to bridge the gap between a person in need and a service the person wouldn't easily have access to by getting other agencies involved. Otherwise the cases would just get left.

The following case study illustrates how TOPAZ integrates advocacy into its work.

### **A case of advocacy**

I was carrying out a follow-up six-week Topaz review with a woman in her eighties who had a very long history of schizophrenia with numerous hospital admissions over a 60-year period. She informed me that she had previously been attending a computer course at her local library (Silver Surfers course) but had been prevented from enrolling on the next part of the course. She was not able to tell me why, and was very upset.

She explained to me that she was feeling very isolated since the death of her husband a few years ago, and had no family or other social support. Her mobility prevented her from accessing some day services but the local library was very close to her home. The course had been a real lifeline for her as it enabled her to gain new skills and was a chance to meet other older people and to structure her week. She felt that this support and structure had helped her remain mentally well and had possibly prevented relapses with her mental health and hospital admissions. I offered to contact the library on her behalf and to advocate for her, which she agreed to.

I spoke to the tutor on the Silver Surfers course who remembered her. He informed me that they had not enrolled her for the next part of the course because she had not achieved what was expected and had been absent on a few occasions. I explained that she was vulnerable and prone to periods of ill health. I also informed him of how important this course was for her in terms of gaining new skills, social interaction etc. and she was very keen to enroll again. I did not disclose any personal information about her mental health other than to say this engagement with the course had been very beneficial and she had enjoyed attending some months ago.

The course tutor considered this information and then agreed to enroll her again in January 2013.

I called the woman with this information and she was very pleased with the outcome and thanked me for my support.

**We don't have eligibility criteria.** TOPAZ does not have a screening process and there are no eligibility criteria. TOPAZ can say 'yes' to people and take their needs seriously. Dee had a referral from a member of Parliament (MP) for a man who comes to see the MP on a weekly basis at the surgery; the MP thought that the man would benefit from TOPAZ services.

The following is a quote from Patrice Fennell, a social worker with TOPAZ. This was taken from an interview with *Community Care* magazine (see [www.communitycare.co.uk/articles/23/08/2012/118457/life-beyond-the-council-meet-the-social-work-pioneers.htm](http://www.communitycare.co.uk/articles/23/08/2012/118457/life-beyond-the-council-meet-the-social-work-pioneers.htm)).

*'The best thing about working with Topaz is the ability to say yes. There are no eligibility criteria; we're offering information to everybody. It's a positive job. The way we work with self-funders, for example. I've been to care homes and met people who've never seen a social worker. It's a good opportunity for people to raise concerns and stops things going undetected.'*

The following case study illustrates how TOPAZ is able to remain involved with people who use services to build a relationship and offer assistance.

#### **Taking the time to build relationships**

I was carrying out a TOPAZ telephone review with a woman in her eighties a couple of months ago. I had read previous case notes on Framework (the social services database) stating that this woman had collapsed at her home a few months previous and she had suffered major organ failure. While in hospital a social worker had visited her property to assess her living conditions and found her home to be in a squalid state. She had been hoarding possessions for many years and the place was very dirty and unkempt and had mice and rat droppings around the home. This was clearly not a suitable environment for her to return to, so they tried to arrange a blitz clean via the local authority. This woman became very concerned about her belongings as she had many items that had belonged to her late husband, and she did not want anything thrown away. She was reassured by the social worker that they would not discard anything without her consent, but she refused this support. She was visited another three times by social workers when she returned home, but each time she refused the blitz clean. A mental capacity assessment was then carried out, but the woman was found to have capacity to make this decision; therefore it appeared nothing could be done.

When I spoke to the woman she told me that she had a number of ongoing health issues. I asked her about the blitz clean and she said she might consider it but needed lots of reassurance. I referred her to a tenancy support service (the Single Housing Project) and informed them about this situation. I informed them that if she would consider this blitz clean then I would be able to organise this via social services. I asked them to visit her on a regular basis and to build up a rapport with her and to try to reassure her about the whole process and support her with this. With time and patience we are hopeful that she will be more accepting of this intervention.

## **2. Community engagement/reducing social isolation**

TOPAZ holds community surgeries to give information and advice about local authority services and to deliver safeguarding messages. Being based in the community gives TOPAZ the freedom to engage in the community as it isn't seen as a council service. It is able to be more autonomous, objective and efficiency-focused. TOPAZ's approach involves going into the community and asking what people want, what resources they already have, their strengths and then to build on these areas. In this sense, TOPAZ is more holistic in looking at all the different areas within a person's life and her/his community – the focus is on health and well-being and social aspects/issues. Through TOPAZ's work, it is challenging the traditional role of the social worker and social services. TOPAZ is finding that many of the people who use services it talks to are experiencing social isolation; it therefore provides information to encourage people who use services to engage in the community through free services. TOPAZ is also finding that there are gender differences in terms of accessing services in the community – women are more inclined to attend the local community groups and men are more reluctant. TOPAZ is able to provide that extra push and to give them that extra confidence to attend the groups. This could be through the follow-up telephone calls to see if the people who use services have followed through on making the contacts that were suggested in the initial review, or by inviting the people who use services to a face-to-face meeting at The Hub where the worker can make the calls and contacts with the service user or go through the information in person and answer any questions.

## **3. Promoting and fostering community health and well-being**

TOPAZ is integrating relaxation and yoga into the local community. For example, Sarika, from TOPAZ, delivers one-hour yoga sessions to the Chinese community where 13-14 individuals (aged 65+) attend on a regular basis. The sessions give them a chance to come out of their houses, to meet friends and to have a chance for relaxation. They include very light stretches, breathing exercises and an opportunity to release stress. There have also been sessions within the Asian community, particularly yoga for women. TOPAZ is also looking to initiate a walking course for Asian women, which will give TOPAZ workers a chance to talk about TOPAZ and for the women to ask any questions. At the moment, TOPAZ is not charging for these services, but might want to charge in the future. TOPAZ is also exploring opportunities to take the yoga and relaxation into care homes, with one-to-one or group sessions. Sarika also attends surgeries at The Hub; at these sessions, the social worker provides information and advice in a large group and then Sarika delivers a 10- to 15-minute relaxation session. The surgeries allow people to see the social worker one-to-one after the group session. The Hub also allows for people to see the social worker one-to-one and for people to see Sarika for individual relaxation sessions. This opportunity really allows people who are experiencing stressful situations to end the surgery session or time at The Hub with a relaxation session to reduce stress and anxiety.

#### **4. Easier access for people who use services/The Hub in Brixton (Lambeth ACCORD)**

TOPAZ aims to meet community members and people who use services within the community. It holds a surgery every Friday between 2pm and 5pm at The Hub in Brixton. This is an opportunity for individuals to come and meet with a social worker one-to-one, and for individuals to receive individual relaxation sessions. Individuals are usually referred to The Hub during telephone reviews where the reviewer identifies that the individual is experiencing a lot of stress or needs assistance in relation to something specific, such as going through forms. This is a free service and there is not a limit on how much someone can use the service.

In addition to The Hub, which provides easier access for community members, TOPAZ workers are also able to work flexibly to integrate into the community. If there is a need to work on a Saturday or Sunday, then the TOPAZ workers will do that. TOPAZ is looking to build up a pool of volunteers who can also provide services to community members out-of-hours.

## **How are the values of social enterprise being evidenced at TOPAZ?**

The following list was compiled through communication with the staff and directors at TOPAZ:

1. There is a flatter management structure. Dee is the manager, but allows for team decision-making.
2. There is more focus on teamwork. If we come up with something that is beneficial or helpful, we are able to trial it in practice.
3. The team atmosphere is more open and relaxed, allowing for each team member to have more say in the direction of the business. Each member has his or her own specialisation, which is equally valued within the team.
4. The practice allows for more time with people who use services to access services. We have built a practice that meets the needs of our local community members and built in different ways for community members to access the services.
5. We are able to truly meet the needs of our community members despite their eligibility status. The practice aims to serve all community members.
6. We are developing a specialised service for our community members by participating in training. The practice has participated in training on domestic violence, forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), and safeguarding in care homes. The team participate in training that meets their own personal needs and interests, training that is beneficial to the individual team members and training that has been organised by Dee for the whole team.

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