

Rolling out RESuLT: Facilitators' Experiences Delivering a First of its kind Evidence Based Intervention Training for Residential Workers

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Abstract

RESuLT is a vocational training course for residential childcare workers. The programme succeeds in delivering content that brings teams' often disparate viewpoints about the impact they can make at work to an optimistic standpoint. The body of shared knowledge that teams receive, as well as the focused debates that take place throughout the training inform practise and support group cohesion allowing members to work together effectively to provide high quality care.

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RESuLT is a vocational training programme for children's homes staff which consists of 10 half-day sessions with additional support for supervisors. The department for Education commissioned the National Implementation Service (NIS) to design the training which focuses on supporting staff to help children and young people develop both self regulation and relational skills through the application of social learning theory methods, combined with an understanding of relational skill building and adolescent brain development.

A unique feature of the RESuLT programme is that it is delivered by two facilitators; one from the Residential Child Care Sector and the other from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The training was trialled with different configurations and having a facilitator with expertise in mental health as well as one with practical experience of working in children's homes struck the right balance for trainees by ensuring equal attention was given to the theoretical and the practical and examining how they interact.

Joys of training a diverse staff team

RESuLT celebrates the diversity of staff teams as a positive thing. Workers reflect together carefully on those areas where they must reach a consensus for the benefit of the young people they care for, and where it is ok to express their

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differing views in a respectful way. RESuLT offers teams protected, interruption free time for reflection. This allows members to come together and share their varied experience and knowledge with each other with the goal of providing the best care possible. Facilitators observe that regardless of how long each staff member have worked in residential care, they are all able to learn something new, reflect on a good piece of work they have completed and recognise the importance of a shared approach when working with children in a residential environment. The value of this process cannot be overestimated and is perhaps the most beneficial aspect of the training over and above any teaching.

Delegates frequently comment on the benefit of this whole team approach which makes RESuLT truly unique. The debates around consistency of care that the training generates provide a starting point for staff teams to think about shaping their service to bring about the most beneficial outcomes for young people.

However, if going forward, some members of the team follow the approach and others do not; the efficacy of the programme will be limited. This is where leadership and management of homes become especially important. Any issues with individual staff members are addressed in a RESuLT informed supervision i.e. a supportive, strengths based context.

Although there are staff members working in homes with a background in Psychology, a majority of delegates do not have much familiarity with neuroscience and the relevance of recent discoveries in the field to their role. The new knowledge; that there is potential for teenagers to change and learn new ways of being, inspires hope and optimism across the board. Staff are reassured that residential work is a hugely important and meaningful vocation

with the potential to help transform the futures of the young people in their care. At the start of the programme, facilitators tend to observe a diversity of views in teams, some staff are optimistic for change whereas others hold the view that they are simply firefighting, rather than making a meaningful difference. RESuLT training succeeds in challenging previously held 'firm' beliefs that there is no hope for relational skill building in the young people we care for, bringing the diversity of views to a place of optimism. The teaching on brain science that shows workers can support the development of new neural pathways is a revelation to many participants; one commented that this 'gave me hope' that the young people could be supported to change. The concept of allowing the whole staff team to learn this important message together serves to unite and increase the level of motivation within teams.

Challenges of training a diverse staff team

One facilitator commented that one of the most striking aspects of delivering the RESuLT training compared to other programmes she has delivered is the diversity of backgrounds of staff. Those who attend bring with them a diverse range of life experiences and reasons for choosing to work in residential child care. Many describe being motivated to work in a children's home due to personal experiences of the care system or having faced challenging experiences during their own childhood. RESuLT facilitators must assume that there are people in the room who have been affected by the issues addressed in the training (i.e. the impact of abuse and or neglect). Participants are encouraged to

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look after themselves and each other during the training by taking time out if necessary and only sharing what they are comfortable with.

Traditionally residential workers attend training courses along with colleagues from other homes or departments, perhaps with one or two of their fellow colleagues. Staff from the same home often attend training in a way that is deliberately staggered as not to leave the home short staffed. The effect of this is that knowledge is held by a few members of a staff team rather than the whole. Even if a special effort is made to cascade knowledge to the team, it will inevitably become at least partially diluted. RESuLT's novel, ambitious whole team approach is beneficial for embedding the subject matter in the ethos of the home. However, the logistics of allowing a whole team to be trained together are complex and some RESuLT sites have struggled with this. 70% of sessions must be attended for the NIS to certify a worker as RESuLT trained. Any home considering training their staff in the programme must be able to find a way to reliably release staff to attend weekly as the team going on the ten week journey together is key to ensuring the programme becomes embedded into their micro-culture. A homes' management team can support this goal by ensuring everyone is scheduled to work on the day of the training where possible, modelling good attendance and stressing the importance of the training to their team.

Each week RESuLT participants are given a piece of reading that is relevant to their role. The readings range from journal articles to blogs. As the level of education which residential workers have accessed varies greatly, some of the participants feel daunted by the longer, or more scientific articles. Several

participants have commented that struggling with the reading makes them feel 'stupid'. The NIS acknowledge the difficulty in finding reading materials that will be appropriate for all participants. The summaries of each reading that are provided are accessible to everyone which helps when individuals struggle with papers. Some facilitators also share the fact that they had had difficulties reading some of the lengthier scientific papers which helps to lessen delegates' anxiety.

Use of self

Facilitators find that use of self within the training is central to putting the teams at ease. This is achieved by modelling kindness, warmth and good humour. Facilitators further support participants by creating a space within which not knowing and needing to enquire further is a healthy and a positive part of the learning experience. Facilitators share that some of the learning was new to them which allows others to voice when they are struggling. An inquisitive approach is adopted by facilitators to learn also from the teams and create a two way process. This promotes the experience of everyone being 'in it together' for benefit of the young people.

A large part of teaching of the RESuLT model is implicit. Facilitators model the model during the sessions; that is they interact with the group in line with the principles we would like young people to learn. These include being kind, empathetic, nurturing and inclusive. The hope is that workers will learn from this modelling and take this way of being back with them to their home. Facilitators must also have an optimistic attitude and a strong belief in the programme.

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These qualities enable positive responses to any voices of dissent regarding the programme without becoming thrown or disheartened. A passionate belief in the RESuLT principles and the possibility for positive growth and change in young people will inspire delegates. One participant commented that it was great to spend time with 'two cheerleaders' on a weekly basis. The worker expressed her appreciation for this and commented that it gave the team a boost and inspired them to approach their very challenging role with gusto and enthusiasm.

There is a debate around whether a facilitator should train the home in which they work due to the complex dynamics this dual role can create. One manager found training his own home to be a very beneficial thing as he was able to effectively lead his staff in embedding the program. Another facilitator, who did not hold a management position, was not as effective at embedding the model at her home as she did not have the same level of autonomy to make changes to the way her home was run. It is important to consider the positioning of the facilitators in their organisation if they are to train their own home as well as other factors such as any pre-existing relationships with delegates.

The theory elements of the course prove useful in providing staff with different lenses with which to view situations that can arise day-to-day in the home when guided in the right way. It is the facilitators' job to ground the content in residential staffs' work and help them to think about how it applies to their role and their young people. Facilitators have had success bringing the script to life by using real life examples from in and out of work. The effect of facilitators peppering the training with their own experiences served to keep the training interesting (as indicated in participant feedback forms) and relaxed.

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Indeed, participants often felt comfortable enough to share about themselves.

One participant commented that the staff team had grown closer and got to know each other on a deeper level since being involved in the RESuLT training.

RESuLT asks participants to share occasions when they may have contributed to rather than helped to diffuse an escalating situation at work in front of their whole team, including their manager. Reflecting such moments as a staff team offers the potential for a great deal of learning and growth to occur. However, this is a really big ask and participants must feel safe enough to share. One facilitator felt strongly that the right thing to do was to answer such sensitive questions herself before requesting responses from the group. This process also reinforced the fact that residential workers will not always get everything right and may well make missteps in their incredibly challenging role. The facilitator's action of being self critical and reflective seemed to give permission for and make the group feel safe enough to talk about situations they may have handled differently in hindsight and reflect together on how to get things right for young people in the future. Encouraging people to be open and reflective about opportunities to improve their practice can only benefit the young people in their care. An independent evaluation of the RESuLT (Berridge et al., 2016) showed that post training staff questionnaires show statistically significant self reported improvements in quality of work, communication and motivation. Feedback is sought from participants after each training session, this is used to inform regular revisions of the programme as well as standalone booster sessions to ensure the training needs of residential workers are met by RESuLT.

About the author

Lisa acts as a Workforce Development Officer as well as a Senior Practitioner at a Children's Home for Leeds City Council. Lisa has a Masters Degree in Psychology and has worked in residential care with children from 7-17 for over 10 years.

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