

Carpet Cleaning Care Evaluation Report

April 2013- April 2014



***This has boosted my confidence. It gave me hope – I think if I
can do this what else can I do?***

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Introduction

Carpet Cleaning Care is a well-established vocational project operating within South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust. It offers vocational training and part time paid work to people who use Lambeth mental health services.

The aim of the project is to facilitate the workforce to gain the necessary skills, confidence and references that are needed to obtain employment or other socially inclusive activities. In 2013 15 people have worked on the project – 10 specifically on the carpet cleaning project. The majority of the work force has been in contact with secondary mental health services between 10 – 25 years and all have been unemployed for over 15 years.

This evaluation sets out to explore and identify:

1. The strengths of the project
2. The challenges and limitations of the project
3. Service users ideas for project developments and improvements

Overview of Carpet Cleaning Care

Carpet Cleaning Care has been operating since 1993. It was the first project in Lambeth (and one of the first nationally) to offer paid work and training to adults who used mental health services within a socially inclusive context. In recent years the project has grown significantly, winning a large contract with the Local authority (Lambeth Council), employing a second project worker and developing partnerships with large private cleaning companies to gain more business and offer work placements for service users.

The project's main activity is a professional and commercial carpet and upholstery service. It provides this service on the open market to private domestic properties, care homes, libraries and commercial properties. It also provides a cleaning service to the Vocational Centre the project is based within, which provides paid work to an additional five people.

The project is housed with Lambeth Vocational Services, where three other projects also facilitate vocational and social inclusion support to Lambeth residents who use mental health service, primarily people who are supported by community mental health teams working under the umbrella of the Psychosis CAG. The majority of referrals for Carpet Cleaning Care come from these teams.

As well as providing paid work for members of the work crew (for up to one year) the project also actively supports the participants with their individual vocational aspirations though one-to-one meetings with the project manager and support and referrals to other vocational services.

Carpet Cleaning Care has developed partnerships with a number of community organisations to facilitate socially inclusive leisure and volunteering opportunities for

members of the project. For example people can volunteer at cycling sessions with Wheels for Wellbeing, or participate in a weekly gardening group at Archbishops Park.

Methodology

The purpose of this evaluation is to explore the effectiveness, achievements and challenges of the Carpet Cleaning Care project.

It was important for the majority of the data to come from service users reflecting on their experience of the project, as our starting point is that the insights of service users is one of the most valuable forms of evidence (Bertram & Linnett, 2003). It was agreed to conduct a focus group to collect qualitative data about the people's perception of the project, and to undertake an in depth interview for a case study to get a more detailed understanding of the impact of involvement for service users. The evaluator designed the interview schedule and focus group questions in partnership with a service manager from SLAM.

A focus group was held on 27th February. Eight members of the carpet cleaning project were invited. Five attended three White British men and two men from a BME background. The interview took place on 8^h May 2014.

To understand the participant's experiences in a wider context an in depth interview was undertaken with the project manager (on 19th May) who has worked on the project for the last eight years.

All qualitative data were recorded and transcribed. The qualitative data was then content analysed and categorised under the key emerging themes.

The project co-ordinator also provided a range of quantitative data that has been analysed and presented within this report.

Findings

What Activity took place – Quantitative Evidence

Between April 2013 and March 2014:

- 15 people have been offered work with Carpet Cleaning Care – 10 specifically on the carpet cleaning project
- The project undertook 125 jobs
- Service Users earned £13,234
- The project generated £71,354 income

Service User Demographic Information

| | |
|--|--|
| Gender Male: 8 Female: 10 | Ethnicity Black African: 3 Black British: 2 White British: 5 |
| Age <35: 3 35-50: 7 | |

Case Study

Life struggles and mental health

Jonathan* began work with Carpet Cleaning Care 18 months ago. He explained that the previous 9 years he had been struggling with anxiety and depression. His confidence was low and he was living in fear of being criticised and rejected. These struggles led him to isolate himself; he had no friends, had been unemployed for 12 years and found it difficult to leave his flat. He described his life as empty and without hope

I was in a bubble, doing nothing in the days and struggled to try new things

He was accessing support from South London and Maudsley NHS Trust, a specialist mental health service. It had been suggested that Jonathan engage with a variety of vocational and therapeutic projects, such as gardening and a social club, but none of them felt meaningful or helpful. He described how nothing could improve his confidence.

Involvement

In November 2012 Jonathan was introduced to Carpet Cleaning Care. He described feeling very anxious at the thought of meeting new people, so was pleasantly surprised to find the Vocational Centre relaxed and welcoming. He met with the project manager who helped him feel comfortable.

I met with Kevin initially; he makes it so easy and puts you at ease straight away

Being unemployed for such an extensive period of time had left Jonathan feeling unsure about working. It was mutually agreed to start with one shift a fortnight and gradually build up, once his stamina and confidence had increased. He described how this flexibility helped the work feel more achievable and less daunting.

When I started I got work about once very fortnight, which was about right for my frame of mind, then is got busier and we were working about once a week. Sometimes double shifts. In the beginning they had to tell me what to do, but then I got more pro- active and learnt different bits of the job

Jonathan described finding the work satisfying and rewarding, his doubts that he could hold down a job were disappearing. His confidence increased further when the project manager acknowledged his skills and offered new opportunities for development

It got to the stage where Kevin was giving me more responsibility – he told me I was in charge, and he would go to the car and leave me in charge. I would show new members what to do. It was a good feeling.

He reflected on the changes that had occurred. He is now a regular, reliable member of the team, who has been able to turn his life around- from living an isolated life with no

vocational support to a more confident individual, with a fuller CV and excellent references, looking for new employment opportunities with local retail organisations. This work experience and the knowledge and skills he has developed will be invaluable for his personal development.

What worked and impact on mental health

When reflecting what had been effective about his involvement in the Carpet Cleaning project, he identified the respectful and supportive relationships that had been built with the managers and his peer colleagues within the work crew. He described how being treated like an equal and the supportive nature of the conversations had helped him feel valued and respected, which was having a positive impact on his mental health. This increased self-worth enabled him to feel more optimistic about the future, and less depressed.

He described how working with supportive managers had helped him overcome his biggest fear – being criticized. In the past this fear had prevented him from undertaking numerous social and vocational opportunities, and had led to distressing periods of anxiety and depression. But his experience on the project – when he was given feedback it was constructive and given with warmth, has led him to change his outlook on life.

My biggest fear was always that I was going to get told off, or criticized for doing things wrong, but carpets has helped me get over this. It's the gentle way they tell you – they might say oh that was a really dirty rug it might need a second going over, not, you didn't do a good enough job. Or you've missed a bit – but said in such a nice way you don't feel bad. This has helped me feel less anxious. I've faced my biggest fear and overcome it. Now I face situations and don't put things off. I feel I can deal with things now.

Conclusion

Jonathan's work with Carpet Cleaning care has helped change his perceptions – of his own abilities and how he can expect to be treated by others. A combination of practical skills development and employment opportunities, with improvements in his mental health has enabled this individual to grow, feel more resilient and prepared to take his employment journey to the next stage of development.

*This participant's name has been changed to protect his anonymity

What works well within Carpet Cleaning Care?

The project is successful in engaging and supporting people who have extensive mental health service use and have experienced chronic social exclusion

The participants of the focus group had all been engaged with mental health services for very long periods of time, the longest being over 35 years, the briefest being 15 years. Many had experienced multiple in-patient admissions, (one work crew member had been in hospital every year for 15 years) traumatic experiences (witnessing extreme violence during a civil war) and additional complications from substance misuse.

People's lives were further debilitated by long term unemployment. The average period of unemployment was 20 years. The project manager stated that most people came to the project with low confidence and lack basic numeracy and literacy skills, as education opportunities were not offered to them. The work crew is made up of a very socially excluded group of people who would find it very difficult to get employment quickly.

One significant finding was how well engaged the team were with the project; people had consistently voted with their feet and chosen to stay engaged. The co-ordinator commented on how impressed he was with participants' reliability and commitment.

Carpet Cleaning Care is an accessible and inclusive project

The project is set up in such a way to be an accessible, inclusive project. The project co-ordinator commented

Our criteria and eligibility is as inclusive and open as possible. We will take anyone from any background. The main criterion is that people want to actively join the project, they have to have made the decision themselves

There is no long assessment to complete, service users are not asked lots of questions about mental health diagnosis, previous jobs (or a lack of them) and there are no entry requirements about experience or qualifications.

The co-ordinator is also mindful to ensure people feel supported when they first join the project. The initial aim is to make people feel accepted; training on the job can come in time

We don't have a trial or probation period. I don't like the sound of that. If they've experienced trauma the last thing they need to think is they're on trial. Let people make up their own mind.

This accessibility and acceptance was valued by the participants, who all commented they appreciated how quickly they were able to start work, and how despite feeling nervous, the staff made them feel comfortable and welcome.

I met with Kevin initially; he makes it so easy and puts you at ease straight away.

I found out about it myself – I went to Effra road, because Kevin used to be based there ...he said try it and see if you like it.

The project offers an alternative, positive experience of work

During the focus group participants shared experiences about previous jobs where they felt exploited, unwelcome or that their mental health had not been supported. These negative experiences had made them fearful about returning to work. In contrast, during their time on the carpets project they felt valued and accepted. The work was manageable and they valued the money they earned.

I was scared of hard work at first when I meet Kevin to be honest I thought he was going to work us to death, but £20 pound a week was not too bad and Kevin is really nice

I was working in a transport yard down Wandsworth Road. I was working for £25.00 a day, living in the caravan on the premises, and no hot water just a little kettle. He worked me to the bone. He worked me really hard made me do a lot of work pulling scrap metal out of rubbish and this was a really dirty job. Things like that goes on in my mind when I think about going back to work, it triggers it.

It's been alright the people that do the work for the carpets seem to be nice people and I like the work.

I really like how they treat you

What works well for participants and why?

All participants reported high levels of satisfaction with the project. Everyone felt a strong sense of belonging to the work crew, and were able to identify a range of benefits from their involvement. There was a clear sense of a close bond between all participants of the work crew, many examples of informal peer support and camaraderie emerged.

When exploring why the project was effective, the following themes were identified:

The work gives people a sense of purpose

A combination of distressing life struggles, long term mental health service use and chronic social exclusion had left the participants feeling pessimistic about their future prospects and unconfident about their own abilities. This in turn reduced their motivation regarding vocational opportunities. Being part of the carpet cleaning project enabled people to gain a sense of purpose in their life, knowing there was work to be done, and they were an essential part of a team helped motivate people.

I really value having a purpose – you have to do the work and it makes you keep at it. When I was recommended to gardening groups or going to the park I would think – what’s the point? I could do this anytime? I don’t just want to be hanging around talking to other people with mental health problems - there’s no reason for me to be here

With carpets – you have to do it – as well as giving me a purpose – it forces me to talk. This has boosted my confidence and now I can hold conversations with people. It gave me hope – I think if I can do this what else can I do?

Definitely keeps you busy, that’s the main thing

It gives me something to occupy my mind on. I can think all week about one day’s work.

The wages earned though the project is helpful money – practically and emotionally

The project pays the participants £20 per shift, which generally works out to £10 per hour. This is different from the majority of other mental health vocational projects, which require people to work for a full day for nothing, or for a basic expenses rate to cover lunch. Participants reported they felt exploited by that model. The wages from the carpets project on the other hand, helped people feel valued and their work respected, as well as providing much needed extra income.

The money is helpful, I've a family to provide for and life's expensive

The money is important its keeps the wolf from the door

That's what it's all about - the money- that what makes the job, that what sparks the person in the first place in it

The money I earned felt different to my disability benefits

I did not like the idea for working for nothing, volunteer work was not for me

Widening Social Networks

Comments shared in the focus group indicated the project had helped create social networks and new friendships were emerging. Participants described how they worked hard during the shift, but relaxed together afterwards, often over a meal. This was a valued time for the team. People had made friends who were offering informal support to one another. There was a strong sense of peer support.

I've met new friends

We stop for lunch and have like little conversation with each other

We eat together round the table.

I take the time to talk now – I challenge myself to start conversations, not just responding to others

I have made some new friends. I have met people outside the circle that was just connected with drugs and dealing.

Alongside the ongoing informal peer support, the project is piloting a more formal integration of peer support, whereby service users are recruited to a paid role of offering practical and emotional support to members of the work crew.

Sense of achievement

The power of the project to facilitate a process of transformative change with people was attributed partly to the nature of the work being undertaken. The project co-ordinator and workers felt responsible for and benefitted from achieving good and satisfying results e.g. transforming a dirty carpet into a clean one. Participants reported:

We rip through the house do the carpets do the bathroom and kitchen. We make it spotless. You see the glow on their face and that's what it's all about.

When he saw the carpet he got this really big amber glow. It was like the place was going to take off; it was the cleanest it had ever been.

We really have become Industrial muscle that's the true fact.

It does change people; the nature of the work helps mental health. Carpet's was an inspired choice of a work project. You get quick results – can get gratification seeing a clean carpet. You can get great job satisfaction – real quick fix and booster. It helps people's mental health.

Individuals' self-esteem was raised when the work of the project was appreciated by others. Their skills were being acknowledged. The award of the large commercial contract with Lambeth Council was particularly validating. Many workers identified getting a strong sense of achievement from the work they did for other people with mental health problems. They understood the link between the physical environment and mental health.

People will have to give us a certain amount of respect because we've done this.

Thousands of jobs and only two complaints in all that time so it speaks for itself.

The quality of work is strong, the new contract proves that we have been successful.

I get like I can't do my own house but I can do someone else's. We rip through the house do the carpets do the bathroom and kitchen we make it spotless. You see the glow on their face and that's what it's all about.

We were cleaning some forensic place. It was filthy. It was satisfying doing the room the geezer he would have choked to death in that room.

Improvements to health and well being

There was clear evidence from service users that their work and involvement with the carpet cleaning project had positively impacted their health and wellbeing in different ways. Participants described an increase in positive mood, self-esteem, physical fitness and an increased capacity to deal with challenging situations. They also reported feeling less depressed, anxious and stressed. One person went so far to say that without his involvement with the project he would be suicidal.

They attributed these improvements to

- The satisfaction they gained from doing the work
- The emotional support from their peers and the staff team
- Having something to occupy their mind
- The physicality of the work

During the focus group participants reflected:

My mood has improved; I'm in a better frame of mind

Once you get here leave all the stress behind

It helps my depression, because it occupies my mind

This has helped me feel less anxious

The project is based (and partly funded by) South London and Maudsley NHS Trust. When considering the cost- benefit of the carpet cleaning project, there are a number of examples of participants costing the wider health service less since their engagement with the project. For example one member had a history of lengthy hospital admissions (13 admissions between 1999 – 2008) which clearly had significant cost implications, yet since joining the project has only had one (three month) admission, and is now having his medication managed in primary care.

Challenges

Income Generation

The economic dimension of the project played a crucial role- creating both positive and difficult scenarios. On the one hand income meant that workers can be paid and most of the project costs, such as staff posts, vehicles and operating costs were covered. Yet on the other hand the commercial demands meant that lots of top quality work required lots of hard efficient work. This commercial priority could transcend the need for effective support for workers because everything is about getting the contract work done. In addition, because of NHS standing financial regulations- even though the project can generate more income- it was seen as pointless because additional profit is removed year on year. However, the potential of getting more contracts was seen as positive because the project could expand its capacity to pay and support more work trainees, and even recruit these trainees as permanent employees.

The project manager reflected:

The dilemma was always the financial systems. What do we do? I could generate loads of income 20 – 25 K but that would be working flat out so no time to support anyone. There is no point earning lots, having it taken back by our finance department and have minimal time to support the members

Lambeth Council has really helped this project – it's really enhanced it, we were starved of funds before.

In getting the balance of commercial interests versus an accessible support project: I insist on top quality work – that's what we're famous for. We have lots of testimony from people.

Participants feel uncertain about their vocational future

There was consensus from all participants that the work on carpets was a positive experience for a variety of reasons. They saw it as economically useful and of benefit to their health. However this positivity did not always carry forward into considering alternative employment. Some people were fearful of employers' response to their mental health problems, and did not feel confident they would be offered work if they disclosed their service use and health problems. Although all participants could identify how working with the project was beneficial to them, some individuals struggled to express how their work with carpets helped them prepare for future work with other organisations. Nor could some participants describe with clarity what their vocational aspirations were. This could be connected to how long the participants had been unemployed, and their extensive mental health service use. The project co-coordinator reflected that individuals' low self-confidence and fears they would not be as accepted with other organisations (who would not be as inclusive as Carpet Cleaning Care) made it difficult for people to look forward with optimism.

No I don't think they would take you on so much as if they knew you had a nervous breakdown they might not take you on.

Don't think you can get other employment when you're not well

I can't really say I can't really focus on the future you see

It's really hard when someone say "what do you want to do" when you don't know what the options are out there.

I could go back to education and study Maths.... Wouldn't mind a Bakery..... Or working in a cinema... Work experience though I like to work somewhere London Zoo for the day something like that for the day.

Participants suggested taster days or placements with other employers could be useful in helping them think about moving forwards.

Conclusion

There is a range of compelling evidence within this report that demonstrates the effectiveness of Carpet Cleaning Care, both as a successful vocational project for mental health service users and as an innovative business model that can provide a quality cleaning service on a large scale to a range of customers.

The project is designed to be accessible and inclusive; service users are offered and can start work rapidly, earning money within weeks of being referred to the project. After a brief risk assessment people are accepted regardless of diagnosis, length of service use, lack of qualifications or work history. This was valued by the participants who often joined the project with low self-confidence and fears about being discriminated within the workplace. However this inclusivity does have implications for the client base of the work project, as evidenced by the average length of mental health service use and unemployment. The work crew is made up of a group of people who have had very significant health and social problems, including multiple hospital admissions, an average service use of 20 plus years, and long term unemployment. This needs to be taken into consideration in terms of the project's remit of supporting participants' to move forwards with their vocational aspirations. There could be scope to increase the involvement of specialist vocational projects (e.g. Vocation Matters, Status employment) to work in partnership with Carpet Cleaning Care in supporting service users in their journey of change and growth.

Service users clearly feel valued, and supported. There was a close bond between the work crew, and evidence of a range of examples of peer support. The pilot of integrating peer support within the project will be important to monitor and evaluate. Everyone spoke highly of the project staff; they were treated with respect as co-workers, not as mental health patients to be 'treated'. Earning a decent wage made a difference in practical terms (having more choice and control in one's life) and also improved people's feelings of self-worth. For many this was a very different experience to other jobs or vocational projects they had been involved in. The dilemma however is that people can become fearful of leaving such a positive and supportive project. Will other employers be so flexible in terms of fluctuating health? Will profit making companies have unrealistic expectations about volume of work to be undertaken on a shift? Service users' suggestions of the project helping to create work placements could help overcome this fear.

The aim (and challenges) to support people to find work elsewhere, should not however detract from the fact that service user's ongoing involvement with Carpet Cleaning Care has health and economic cost benefits both to individuals and the wider health service. There was clear evidence from service users that their work and involvement with the carpet cleaning project had positively impacted their health and wellbeing. Peoples' confidence had grown due to a new sense of purpose and having a meaningful job to perform. People reflected that their self- esteem had improved as a result of gaining a sense of achievement through the work. Participants reported feeling more resilient and able to take on new challenges in their life since developing new skills and abilities.

These improvements to health and well-being are reflected in terms of mental health service use. Only one person in the last year has needed to access crisis services. Two people have been discharged from specialist secondary services to primary care; this includes an individual who had very significant health and social care problems – resulting in 13 admissions between 1999- 2008. These cost savings need to be researched further in order to fully identify the cost benefit of the project. It is also recommend that the project begins to regularly use wellbeing measures (such as the Warwick Edinburgh Mental wellbeing scale) to collect reliable data on the impact of the project. A limitation of this evaluation is that we were unable to hear the insight of service users who have been involved previously but have disengaged. It is important to understand the reasons behind their decision, and what the project could learn from their critiques.

Currently the project receives some core funding from South London and Maudsley NHS Trust. However the large contract with Lambeth Council has enabled the project to grow significantly without requiring additional funds. It has expanded to employ a new support worker and seven new work crew members. The new sources of income meant that workers can be paid and project costs, such as staff posts, vehicles and operating costs are covered. The size of the contract was new territory for both the project and the Local Authority, but feedback from project staff, service users and customers indicates it is a success. This project demonstrates that public sector procurement money can be used as a catalyst to address the equality and social inclusion agenda. It is possible for the project to expand further and this model of working could be replicated in other areas e.g. setting up vocational projects that co-produce goods and services in partnership with public sector procurement departments.

The project is managing to undertake high quality commercial work whilst still facilitating effective support to the work crew. It is important to continue to monitor and evaluate this work to develop the learning and potential.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the members of the work crew who kindly agreed to meet and share their insights and experiences about Carpet Cleaning Care. The commitment and loyalty you have to the project shone through. Thank you also to Kevin Poulton, project co-ordinator in giving your reflections of the project and useful activity data. I am very grateful to Mark Bertram for not only offering his support and guidance for this evaluation, but for establishing and developing this innovative and inspiring enterprise.

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