

Men Can Care

Views of male staff working within three learning disability services in Northern Ireland



Introduction

The **POISE** (Promoting Opportunities for Inclusion in Social Care Employment) project aims to promote equality in employment in the care sector in Northern Ireland focusing initially on learning disability. POISE seeks to help broadly two groups of people:

- Men who have not previously been employed in the sector
- Women who may experience obstacles to remaining in care sector employment or progressing in their careers

The Men Can Care report presents the findings from 3 focus groups held with male staff in direct support roles from learning disability services within each of the 3 partner agencies:

- Positive Futures
- North and West Belfast HSS Trust
- Ulster Community and Hospitals HSS Trust

The views of males within learning disability are extremely important as the workforce ratio is 80% female to 20% male. Therefore, views of male staff may assist the recruitment of males into the service in the future.

The aims of the focus groups were to provide male staff with the opportunity to get their voices heard around recruitment and to ensure that a 'male perspective' is included in resources produced by the project. Additionally, the findings of the research will assist service providers in efforts to develop a diverse workforce.

Letters of invite to the focus groups were sent to 28 males who had been identified as working in direct support roles. In total, 14 males, representative of the 3 partner agencies, attended the focus groups.

The POISE team would like to thank all staff who attended the focus groups for their assistance in the research study. This newsletter provides a brief summary of the key results from the report.

Common Issues

From the research, participants highlighted various common issues around working within the service and their actual role:

- In the job for the person not the money
- Starting the job takes too long
- Low pay
- Learning disability needs more awareness
- High levels of bureaucracy
- Training depends on staffing level

Fears

Similarly, when participants were asked to consider any fears they hold or felt other males may hold around working within learning disability services, common issues arose:

- Being labelled gay
- Providing personal care
- Accusations from females of abuse
- Lone working/isolation
- Others seeing it as easy work or women's work
- Getting through the door

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What's the best part of your job?

The findings from the research illustrated that participants rated the reward of helping someone with a learning disability achieve something as the best part of the job. This was closely followed by:

- Good opportunities for training and promotion
- Management open to ideas
- Long-term job satisfaction
- Good relationship with other staff

What would you like to improve?

During the focus groups participants stated ways they felt their jobs could be improved:

- Improved pay
- Better recognition of their work
- More time to 'care'
- Better management support
- Opportunity to actually partake of training
- Job adverts reflecting the actual work

Recruitment of males into the service

The participants were asked if they had any ideas on how to attract more males into the sector. The following highlights the range of ideas that participants had:

- Highlight that no 2 days are ever the same
- Promote the job in the Belfast Telegraph (Job Finder front page)
- Highlight the person not the disability

- Work with schools and other agencies to raise awareness of learning disability

Additionally, some participants suggested that a promotional video be used. The POISE project are currently producing a DVD to inform the public about learning disability and the jobs involved in learning disability services.

The DVD will include interviews with direct support staff, people with a learning disability and service managers to highlight both the benefits and challenges within the social care sector and specifically learning disability services. For regular updates on development visit our website at www.arcuk.org.uk/northern_ireland/

Conclusions and recommendations

The research illustrates that the main reason males seek employment within learning disability services, is to help other individuals achieve their potential. Additionally, it highlighted the unanimous view that advertising the reality of the job was key to the recruitment of males into learning disability services. Therefore, it is recommended that current recruitment processes be reviewed with staff to address issues around support for male staff, especially around induction.

[Copies of the full "Men Can Care" report can be obtained from the POISE office.](#)

POISE is a project funded under the EQUAL programme and is delivered through a Development Partnership that comprises of: **ARC (NI), North and West Belfast HSS Trust, Positive Futures, Ulster Community and Hospitals HSS Trust.**