



Connection Support

**Methods
Of Work**



Scope

Connection Support Methods of Work distils the approach to delivering support and is fundamental to informing staff induction and as a reference point for all stakeholders including commissioners.

Its purpose is to enable the reader to be as clear as possible about how Connection goes about our life changing work and the approach we use.

This includes:

- **The theoretical basis underpinning the work**
- **How we go about engaging with people**
- **Drawing on the strengths & aspirations of service users to achieve goals**
- **The relevance to new services and the individuals who use those services**
- **The range of people we support including higher/complex needs**
- **The response to external changes including shorter term working**
- **How we measure outcomes and learn**

About Us

Connection Support has been providing services since 1996 originating in Oxford, developing across Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire. The approach involves close partnership with other services, and alongside health and social care sectors. This includes stand alone “Connection Support” projects and also projects that involve a wide range of partnerships with other organisations.

Connection Support firmly believes that collaborative working ensures that the people who need our support the most have access to all the assets that are necessary to change their lives.

Connection Support works closely with commissioners and other relevant parties to identify and respond to local strategic need. Like many other services we have felt the pressures brought about by reduced funding. Part of this process has led to adapting new ways of working, developed with people who receive support, to maximise the value of the support we can provide to the greatest number.



The Mission

At Connection Support we combine genuine care with a professional and dedicated approach so that we can successfully engage with people to enable them to achieve their personal goals and live a quality lifestyle.

Our Values

- **A curious approach to understanding the realities of every service user.**
- **A commitment to finding ways of being genuinely and positively relevant in every life we touch.**
- **Belief in the capability of every one we work with.**
- **Valuing difference in service users and staff.**
- **Helping people achieve and retain independence.**
- **Employing highly skilled staff.**
- **Involving people in communities.**

“Thank you so very much for a lovely time, you were all welcoming I didn’t feel intimidated once. I felt confident for the first time in years. It is amazing what work you all are doing. How can I thank you enough?”

— Feedback from Service user event



What We Do to Change Lives

Connection Support provides a range of specialist support services to a wide array of people who are facing complex life challenges, helping them to:

- **Take control of their situation**
- **Regain their health and wellbeing**
- **Live an independent and fulfilling life**

We specialise in enabling change in the lives of people in the following areas:

Having a Home

Whether actually rough sleeping, or where existing accommodation is at risk we help to find solutions to enable people to keep a roof over their head and feel secure.

Financial Health

we help people to find workable solutions to issues around debt and insufficient income including support to apply for benefits and help to find a job that will sustain financial health.

Staying Connected

Evidence has shown that social isolation is known to be one of the leading causes of ill health. Connection Support helps to find or create activities which bring people together around a common interest to increase happiness by reducing loneliness.

Building Communities

working with community groups, enabling them to generate and implement changes that will increase well-being and resilience.

Independent Living Skills

Support with communication skills, confidence building and enabling people to recognise their own strengths and transferable skills. Supporting people to access employment, volunteering or meaningful activity. We can also assist with Budgeting, Using equipment, Digital inclusion, Cooking etc.



Who We Work With

Connection Support supports a wide range of adults and families from varied backgrounds, difficulties and situations. Many of our service users have multiple needs and as such experience difficulty in accessing appropriate services. Conventional approaches to most support services are based on meeting a specific need such as mental health or substance misuse.

People referred to our service may have one or several of the following issues:

- **Mental Health Need**
- **Homelessness/Risk of Homelessness**
- **Complex Needs**
- **Offending**
- **Domestic Violence**
- **Physical Disability**
- **Learning Difficulty including Autism**
- **Leaving Care**
- **Older People**
- **Young People**
- **People facing an unforeseen crisis**
- **Refugees**

“Brian, 68, has recently moved into a scheme and a Connection Support volunteer has put up curtain rails and curtains and has tuned in a television that he has not been able to use for the past 2 years!!! Brian is delighted.”

— Example of volunteer input



How We Work

Connection Support starts with the focus on encouraging the client to define what needs to change and to empower them to seek resolutions. Setting out to work with people to make their own skills visible and give them the self confidence to transfer and develop these skills to reach their own solutions. Connection Support considers that this inclusive way of working encourages motivation and self belief. Enabling the service user to identify other assets and resources that may be available and how and when to access them is a core part of our work. Each service user develops independence and is much less likely to require support services in the future.

Assessment and Support Planning are focussed on assets, building on interests, concentrating on the person's strengths.

The Forensic Approach is central to ensuring that our work is targeted and relevant – it is based on the principle “previous difficulties and risks are the best indicator of future risks”. Our analysis of previous difficulties informs the work we do with every person we support.

We see every service user in the reality of their lives and relationships and what has meaning for them and craft our work directly in relation to this context.

Service users define the problem, generate alternatives, and implement the solutions with a Support Worker enabling, encouraging, motivating, believing and coaching them to positive results.

Every worker knows their way around and the languages and systems of housing, homelessness, benefits, social care, addiction, psychiatry and safeguarding so that they can explain to and advocate for each service user to make best use of the resources available.



Theoretical Models

All of the work of Connection Support is

- **Person centred**
- **Psychologically informed**
- **Focussed on achievements**
- **Considerate and compassionate about the experience of every client**

Connection Support's staff draw on a range of theoretical models, which are set out below. This enables the support to be relevant to the wide diversity of our service users based on the person, their abilities, needs, learning style, and preferred method of working.

Models used include:

Recovery Model

This model is used within our Mental Health service. Putting this model into action requires focussing on supporting recovery and building the resilience of people with mental health problems; enabling them to achieve a quality lifestyle by not just treating or managing their symptoms, looking beyond the mental illness and developing life skills and social inclusion.

Good Lives Model

A theory of offender rehabilitation, it focusses on the contributing factors that have led a person to offending behaviour. Challenging changes to that behaviour and equipping the individual to access appropriate resources to make that change. It is a strengths based approach which helps the individual to identify skills that can be developed and drawn upon to achieve their goals.



Assertive Engagement

This is an approach to the delivery of services that is effective even for the hardest to reach clients. Assertive engagement requires the worker to think outside of the box and often involves the merging of two or three models of working. It needs to be creative and flexible so that it meets the needs of the most complex of clients. Connection Support staff are skilled and supported to work with complexity and have access to Complex Needs Champions.

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

This focuses primarily on honing and employing existing strengths within individuals and their community rather than concentrating on deficiencies. Working through empowerment, it aims to find solutions to problems through existing community's assets. Asset Mapping is a key part of building communities. Principles that guide ABCD include:

1. **Everyone has gifts: each person in a community has something to contribute.**
2. **Relationships build a community: people must be connected in order for sustainable community development to take place.**
3. **Citizens at the centre: solutions are generated by citizens, rather than them being the 'recipients'.**
4. **Leaders involve others: community development is strongest when it involves a broad base of community action.**
5. **People care: challenge notions of "apathy" by listening to people's interests.**
6. **Being Heard: decisions come from conversations where people are heard.**
7. **Ask: asking for ideas is more sustainable than giving solutions.**



Gibbs Model: Reflective Learning (Gibbs Reflective Cycle 1988)

Connection Support find that for many of our clients the most effective way of developing their life skills is by learning from past experiences. This is where Gibbs' Reflective Cycle is useful. Support Workers use this model with clients to help them to make sense of situations, so that they can understand what they did well and what they could do better in the future. The conscious analysis of situations helps to build confidence and resilience when facing similar problems in the future. The Gibbs Model has 6 stages of reflection and are a simple and effective tool for coaching and mentoring people to better manage in similar circumstances :-



“In my experience you work very well, complementing our service, working in partnership with both client and professional, getting to know your client and their needs well and being able to provide useful insights into the clients situation”

— Community Psychiatric Nurse

Motivational Interviewing

Motivating others to make life changes requires the worker to have an understanding of the difficulties and barriers that may face a client. There are 5 basic principles to Motivate Change – (Miller and Rollnick 1991):-

Express Empathy

Requires active listening and reflection.

Avoiding Argument

Arguments are counter productive and increases resistance.

Supporting Self Efficacy

Helping the client to find the positive learning from past efforts to change and drawing on their strengths.

Rolling with Resistance

Constructive challenge of resistance – the aim is not to argue with statements but to carefully examine the thought process behind them.

Developing Discrepancy

The client identifies the goals they want to achieve. The exercise of getting the client to outline their goals gives the support worker valuable insight into how realistic these goals are and what is the priority for change.



Cycle of Change (Prochaska and Diclemente 1983)

The Cycle of Change Model enables both the service user and the worker to identify where they are at in the change cycle. It informs the basis of support planning and any possible barriers to prevent change.

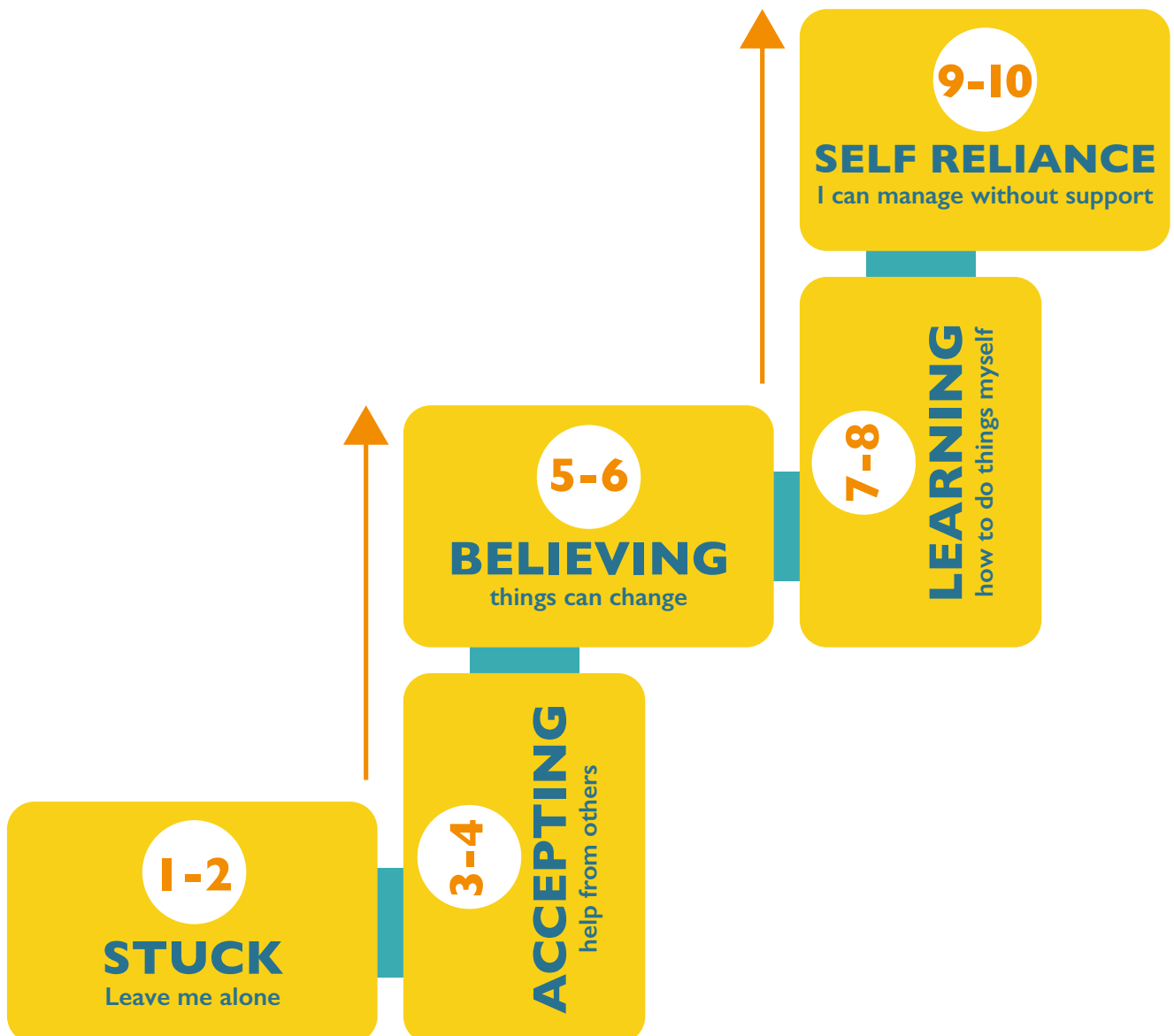
There are Six Stages to the Cycle of Change:



Outcome Star and Ladder of Change

Support Plans are developed and reviewed with the use of Outcome Star and Ladder of Change. This is a tool that is widely recognised by stakeholders and commissioners. Many of our service users are familiar with the model and have reported that they find it easy to follow and enable them to be active participants in their own support. There are several versions of the Outcome Star and we mainly focus on the model that best suits the service user needs. For Example within our Mental Health Project we use the Recovery Star, similarly we use the Homelessness Star for those service users who are homeless or at risk of losing their home.

All versions are designed to be used alongside the “Ladder of Change” which consists of a number of scales clearly defined in a format that enables both the support worker and the service user to identify at which stage they are at. This then informs the support planning process. Ladder of change stages are:



The Importance of a Skilled Workforce

The complexity and diversity of our work requires a multi-disciplinary and skilled workforce. Connection Support actively recruit our staff to fit the needs of each service, particularly looking for staff that have good problem solving skills, can relate to the service user, and have a positive attitude to personalised support planning. All staff undergo a comprehensive induction, ongoing training, with access to mentors, and learn from service users who are experts by experience.

Clinical Supervision is provided in all teams with use of an external facilitator. This provides access to expertise in specialist areas. All staff receive individual supervision from managers who really know support work and an Annual Appraisal which informs their Personal Development Plan for the following year.

Connection Support provide opportunities for Apprenticeships and Internships within the Organisation.

Volunteers

As an organisation Connection Support knows the value of the input from our volunteers and there has been substantial investment in developing the use of volunteers.

Volunteers provide an essential additional value to our projects. There are various roles a volunteer can apply to, some volunteers work face to face with clients, others make telephone contact, are office based or support both clients and staff as Experts by Experience. Volunteers are DBS and reference checked in line with our Safer Recruitment Policy. Volunteers receive induction, supervision, training and access to staff mentors.

The use of volunteers has enhanced our work greatly and has enabled us to develop new ways of working as well as new projects. It also provides an opportunity for individuals who have been service users to progress their skills through volunteering and peer mentor roles into meaningful employment and social integration.

“Serena, who is a volunteer with Connection Support, has helped me to buy a mobile phone and has been very patient in showing me how to use it. I can now talk to my daughter who lives 80 miles away whenever I want to. I can call for help in an emergency. It is brilliant!!!”

— Example of Volunteer Input



Service User Involvement

Connection Support is committed to involving service users directly in shaping the support they receive and in the development of our work. We aim to ensure that service users are provided with the opportunity to represent the service at all levels. Service users will be supported and encouraged to develop skills and make a difference to our work. Service users opportunities on group and individual basis are:

- **Directly involved in shaping and reviewing the service they receive from their worker so that this is as relevant and helpful as possible to the changes they wish to make in their lives.**
- **Involvement in strategic planning, press work, tenders e.g. how to meet payment by results targets and service redesign e.g. development of a phone support service to minimise impact of reductions in funding.**
- **Representation at review meetings and launches of new projects, i.e. making opportunities for contact with Commissioners and Board Members. Focus Groups / meetings to discuss topics, issues, policies and procedure.**
- **Service users are also encouraged to participate in annual survey, exit questionnaire and by their worker asking specific questions.**
- **Input to staff development and training as Experts by Experience e.g. training for staff from service users who have benefitted from Complex Needs Service.**
- **Act as Peer Mentors.**
- **Volunteer or after appropriate period of ending support become members of the staff workforce.**
- **Make compliments or complaints which we can learn from.**



Evaluating What We Do

It is by evaluating the impact of our work in a fast changing external environment that Connection Support continuously improves our practice. We evaluate our work via:-

- **Outcome Monitoring**
- **Local Performance Targets (in line with local strategic needs)**
- **Monitoring of unmet needs (useful for strategic development and data shared with commissioners)**
- **Closure Review with clients**
- **Exit Questionnaires**
- **Complaints and Compliments**
- **Service User Involvement**
- **Steering Groups– including service users and all stakeholders**
- **Annual Review of Service – involving Staff, Service Users, Family and Relatives, Referring Services, Other Agencies, Commissioners**

Connection Support is committed to delivering a quality service. In addition to outcome monitoring required to meet the needs of commissioners, we have also developed a robust internal monitoring system. Feedback is taken from a variety of sources and analysed to ensure that successful outcomes are achieved and demonstrated. Any shortfall is addressed immediately and will be incorporated into our planning and review mechanisms. Learning is shared across the organisation and forms part of review of policies and practice.

“Communication is excellent, kept fully updated with all referrals. Friendly staff, very approachable and always willing to give advice professional to professional”.

—Stakeholder Review 2016



Developments

Connection Support has diversified using our core skills. We are now delivering a wide range of projects:

Oxfordshire Homeless Pathway

Part of the Oxfordshire Homeless Pathway supporting people in shared housing alongside our new partner organisation Response.

Merger with Housing Interaction Trust.

We have completed a merger with Housing Interaction Trust in Buckinghamshire providing accommodation and support for young people with vulnerabilities.

Connect

delivering short term support and building Asset-Based Communities with older people in Independent Living in Bucks.

Making Every Adult Matter

Providing the coordinating role, a multi agency approach to supporting service users with complex needs and leading chaotic lifestyles.

Syrian Refugees

in partnership with Asylum Welcome we are delivering support to Syrian Refugees newly arrived in this country with resettlement work.

Autism Service

delivering Independent Living Skills to people in the community on the Autistic Spectrum in Bucks.

Connection Support Outreach Service

working to engage and accommodate rough sleepers across Bucks and Oxfordshire.

We believe that these ventures make best use of the wide range of skills of Connection Support staff and the available resources to benefit service users. We have taken on new areas of work with new ways of thinking.



Opportunities and Challenges

The Health and Social Care Sector has undergone a prolonged period of austerity. Commissioners have had to make difficult decisions about reducing funding to services despite acknowledging their importance and strategic relevance. As with other services Connection Support have been asked to deliver more for less money but have retained our reputation for working positively with Commissioners and Service Users to maximise the value of our work.

Connection Support has taken the opportunity to review our Methods of Work. Connection Support are determined to enable as many vulnerable people as possible to live safe, secure, independent and fulfilled lives.

Connection Support continue to make strategic decisions that provide us with both opportunities to develop new ways of working, and present us with challenges that require solutions.

One of the biggest challenges we have identified is the move to shorter term working with our clients. Many of our contracts now require clients to have completed their programme of support within 6 months, with 60% of clients to have exited the service by this time period. This reflects the cuts in funding and subsequent capacity. It is essential to move people on quickly to prevent blockage and access of the service. However whilst for some clients this shorter period keeps them to remain focussed on outcomes to good effect, for others it is detrimental to progress. This is a challenge that we continue to actively seek to find solutions for.





☎ 01865 711267

✉ enquiries@connectionsupport.org.uk

🐦 @connectionsup

📍 213 Barns Road, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 3UT

www.connectionsupport.org.uk