

## The Big Plan – Summary of work to date

### Background.

ARK Community Networks, Richmond Fellowship and The Action Group supported 12 individuals to participate in a process known as the Big Plan. As well as hoping for a positive process and positive outcomes for the 12 individuals, the 3 agencies also hoped to see some learning for support staff, and to share learning about this type of approach across the 3 organisations. The Big Plan has been developed and pioneered in the UK by Heather Simmons (H2 Consultancy and Training) and Steve Coulson (Edinburgh Development Group), who agreed to share their experience by facilitating our sessions. All Steve and Heather's work to date has been done with young people; this was the first time the process has been followed with older adults.

### The Process.

*The Big Plan is a process which brings a group of people and their families together to plan for a good life. People can invite whoever they would like to help them with this – parents, brothers and sisters, grandads, aunties or friends. They can ask any professionals they think might be able to help - but they don't have to.*

*Over a series of meetings each person works on a person centred plan for their life. Each session involves lots of activities and ideas and the mood is relaxed and very informal. If they want to, each person shares their insights and ideas with the whole group.*

*At the end of the sessions everyone will have a plan with some action steps to take and a group of people around them to help and support them take those steps. Additional support for teams is available in the large group sessions.*

### The Sessions

*The Big Plan is built around a very big, very important question:*

***What would it take for this person to have an interesting, fulfilling life where they could meet people who would become their friends and make their contribution to their community?***

*There are 5 sessions in The Big Plan. Each one of the sessions concentrates on a part of the question.*

*Session 1 helps people think about who the person is and who are the significant people around them.*

*Session 2 explores what "interesting and fulfilling" means for the person and thinks particularly about their dreams for the future.*

*Session 3 is still thinking about "interesting and fulfilling" but this time the focus is on the person's gifts and qualities.*

*There is a bit of a shift in Session 4 and the process starts to look at the wider community and think about where the person with dreams and gifts might find a welcoming place and people who share their interests and passions.*

*Session 5 brings all of the work of the previous sessions together and makes a plan of action, giving people things to do to support the person build a good life.*

Each of the individuals from the 3 organisations attended an introductory session to inform them of what the Big Plan is and how it works. 12 of them chose to attend the 5 sessions of the planning process. A thirteenth individual attended the introductory and first session and then chose not to return, although his staff team continued to attend and learn about the process.

All 12 remaining individuals were very committed to the process. Most attended every session, with two people missing one session when the weather was bad, but only after spending a frustrating two hours stuck in traffic in an attempt to get to the venue, such was their commitment to the process. One of these individuals missed another session due to a prior engagement.

Each person brought at least one staff member from the provider organisation to support them; some brought family and other friends, although the presence of non paid people was small.

Each team had a 'team supporter' whose role was to assist the process and ensure the focus person remained at the centre at all times. These 'team supporters' were recruited from the provider organisations, from EDG and from the Local Area Co-ordination services in Edinburgh and East Lothian.

Here are some extracts from the feedback we got on evaluating the process.

### **Feedback from focus people**

'I enjoyed the meetings; I enjoyed talking about Blackpool and about dancing and getting ideas for things to do. My keyworker will help with my action plan, and my sisters will help too'.

'It went well, I learned a whole lot, the best thing was having people around me helping me, and the drawings I've got from it.'

'It was in a nice building and I met a lot of people I hadn't met before. It got me thinking.'

'Everyone was made to feel welcome. Speaking into the microphone was really funny, it made me laugh. The food was delicious.'

### **Feedback from team supporters**

'It was an amazing package with life changing possibilities on offer. It felt really special and radical. It offered more insight into person centred working for me as a member of staff. There was good facilitation from Steve and Heather – a very interactive and effective way of bringing things out that would otherwise not have come out. The process helped people speak up. It was very respectful – met people where they were, gave people time. The 2 hours were well paced.'

'The things that the support staff would have suggested on behalf of the focus person at the end of the Big Plan process were definitely different to the things that they would have suggested at the beginning. For example, at the end of the Big Plan, one of the teams had moved their thinking away from the idea of somebody going to a day centre.'

'**B's** Gran was full of praise for the process. She said that the people were great, that you don't often get a chance to do this sort of thing. It made her think differently about the possibilities. Was good for reflecting on 'what next' for **B**.

'The process probably needed more introduction time and build up by organisers, as this would have helped staff to get a sense of added importance and what is required to make the process work well.'

'Could it be built in a way that offers more formal 'training' for staff – or helps them be more reflective about the process?' 'Getting people to do a reflective log might have been a structured idea for a way of following up on what staff learned'.

### **Feedback from staff who were there to support the 12 individuals**

'I really loved it! I got a more in-depth picture of the person and I felt motivated/empowered that I could make things happen. It also gave me a different outlook and more confidence.'

'I really liked the way each session was separate and had only one or two things to focus on at a time. It was not so confusing as other person centred plans I have taken part in - it allowed the person to focus on a topic rather than on the bigger picture'.

'As a student, it helped me for my course – we are doing person centred planning in class. It helped my understanding. I thought it was great'.

'The Action Plan was positive and not too demanding of staff time to follow up on. The things that were suggested can be fitted in. It is expanding on things she is already doing, not stopping things'.

'It showed the person is doing the things she likes, and not stuff she hates'.

'The structure was brilliant'.

### **Feedback from managers - Project Managers and Heads of Section.**

'Have spoken to the person and saw it as a very person centred tool - very beneficial to him as he had come to a bit of a dead end. Service users tend to tell staff what they think they want to know - so hoped that he would say things that he wouldn't say to staff. He was very enthusiastic about going. He spoke about it a lot. Some elements of the process need to be well explained to staff, especially those who are not experienced.'

'Benefits to the person - being listened to, taken seriously, being engaged in a process outwith normal day to day routine, felt they were at the centre. Staff were a bit sceptical at first but could see where it was going and how it all fitted together as

the process went on. The concern was that it was raising expectations that could not be met, but they felt that that was dealt with during the process’.

‘Thought the person enjoyed the process but not sure what tangible things she got out of it - she enjoyed the sessions and feeling important.’

‘It was really good to see the progress in individuals - taking the microphone etc.’

Most managers said it had been quite short notice to organise rotas. The timing of the sessions was difficult - i.e at tea time. Week ends would have been better said one manager. Also the length of sessions, at 4 hours, was more time than the individuals would have been getting support for normally, so this had a knock on effect. One manager said ‘it might have been easier if staff had been prepared for the process in advance but would still have been difficult to predict who would be available 5 weeks in advance. I could absolutely see the need for continuity as the process became clearer’.

### **What have we learned about the Big Plan process so far?**

- In general, people felt the process was a bit rushed at the beginning in terms of getting things fully understood at project level to get staff on board. Staff were not all totally tuned into what we were trying to do. We would therefore propose in future to meet with staff before the process starts to prepare them for the process and their role within it and give them chance to ask questions
- Ensuring consistency of staff is really important – this posed a difficulty for all the provider organisations which led to some work not being followed through on, and some staff not seeming to be clear about the purpose of the sessions or their role within it.
- The next time we use the process, we will consider using it as a more formal process for training staff – linking into values based, person centred training and qualification requirements. At the very least, we will try to find a way to ask staff to reflect on their learning, through producing a learning log for example.
- It was not always possible to have the same ‘team supporter’ with the same person each week, but all the team supporters felt that this would be a really important thing to try to put in place if possible on future occasions.
- The lack of family and other non paid people had an impact – more creative ideas might have ensued, and there would possibly have been more people to follow up on the action steps. We therefore need to do more to involve other people - particularly during the ‘community mapping’ session.
- It was good to have two teams joining up for the community connection brainstorming exercise. We would propose to do this again.
- We would consider using the time when people are eating at the beginning as an occasion for participants to socialise. Having the food in a different room would help this.

### **What next?**

After an initial meeting to ensure that action plans have been shared with support staff, and to ascertain that the time is there to progress them within existing support hours, we plan to meet each person and their team three months down the line and then 6 months down the line to see what progress has been made in achieving their dreams, what learning has ensued, for the focus people and for staff, and what

barriers have arisen to progressing the dreams. With one individual, we plan to create a Circle of Support.

We also plan to bring everyone back together at the end of the 6 months to share with each other the progress that has been made towards a more fulfilling life.

We need to also think about how to share our learning between Richmond, the Action Group and ARK, in order to try and embed person centred approaches and thinking as deeply as possible within the organisations and amongst staff.

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