

Making a Difference Hall of Fame

Think Again

The Think Again programme in Swindon provides lifeline support for people with dementia and their families



The Challenge

Receiving a diagnosis of dementia can be devastating, raising questions about what the future holds for both the individual and their family.

For many people, a diagnosis of dementia can be such a negative experience that they might stop important and enjoyable activities, leading to a loss of ability and confidence, deteriorating wellbeing and quality of life.

In the past the Swindon Memory Service had been providing support for carers, but in common with many other Memory Clinics, did not offer the same support for people with the diagnosis, who were sometimes left feeling frightened and unable to cope.

Prompted to address this imbalance Rose-Anne O'Hare and other therapists designed an early intervention approach that enabled clients to manage feelings

associated with their diagnosis and created occupational support to prevent disempowerment and loss of independence.

What we did

When designing what an early intervention should include Rose-Anne looked at research evidence to find out what worked best and looked to see what other centres were doing to support clients post-diagnosis. Using this information the Think Again programme was designed.

The Think Again programme is a closed, post-diagnosis therapeutic group for five to seven clients and their carers. The programme lasts for eight weeks and is supported by two members of staff who remain constant for the entire course.

Each session lasts two hours with a different focus each week. For part of each session the group is split into two, clients and carers.

Key learning

- Take advantage of the skills and expertise available in multidisciplinary team
- Evaluate constantly! Ask for feedback from group and act on it
- Simple verbal feedback is recorded and themes identified
- Course content is client led - they are the experts
- Flexibility – expect evolution within each group
- Group approach is crucial in normalising the condition and reducing stigma
- Working with partner organisations helped to create continuity of support for clients and carers

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Avon and Wiltshire 
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This approach creates a safe place for people to talk about sensitive issues. Clients and carers come together at the end for a group discussion. Including the carers in the group is a vital part of enabling the carer and client to tackle the problems and make changes together.

The Think Again programme covers a range of areas including;

- Exploration of feelings about the diagnosis, loss and grief
- Memory – how it works and how it is affected

- Practical coping strategies
- Meaningful occupations to maintain quality of life
- Goals for the future
- Q&A with a psychiatrist
- Life story
- Communication
- Effect of the illness on relationships
- Anxiety and relaxation

At the end of each session verbal feedback is gained from clients and carers to find out how useful the session has been and what else might have been helpful.

Health professionals also reflect on how the session worked and how it could be improved next time.

Carers are provided with a detailed summary of each session.

Close working partnerships with the local Alzheimer's Society and Swindon Carers ensures that Think

Again participants receive seamless support to move on.

Who was involved

Rose-Anne O'Hare Occupational Therapist

Alzheimer's Society, Swindon

Swindon Carers

A wide range of health and social care professionals contribute to Think Again providing an important range of perspectives.

What difference did it make

Since 2005 more than 18 Think Again courses have run involving 200 clients and carers.

Clients and carers are equipped emotionally and practically to face challenges ahead and frank discussions encourage more open discussion with family and friends.

'Dementia does not mean the end of life, there is a way forward'

'I think I am ready to tell my family now'

Participant feedback is positive. The group dynamic is powerful, allowing clients and carers to share their fears and concerns with people experiencing the same journey.

'I'm not frightened anymore'

'It's good to know I am not alone'

Think Again is client-focused and through a process of constant listening and evaluation the programme has changed and continues to do so.

A detailed training manual is available for anyone interested in running the Think Again group.

Contact

For more information please contact

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enable and empower people to reach their potential and live fulfilling lives