



Still Listening, Still Learning: Personal Outcomes in 2025 and Beyond

Your name, role and organisation:

Julie Gardner, Coach and Trainer, The Thistle Foundation

You email address/contact details:

Julie.gardner@thistle.org.uk

Story title: Reconnecting to our purpose

Overview: Can you tell us what is the piece of work, practice or initiative that you want to tell us about? (who was involved and what was the focus)



Following an inspection by the Care Inspectorate in April last year one of the main bits of feedback was around the inconsistency in the quality of what was contained in 'My Life My Support Plan', Thistle's person-centred support planning tool. Each person supported by Thistle through our Supported Living teams, should have an up to date, and meaningful 'My Life My Support Plan'. The plan contains various sections, some of which focus on the practical details for the person – medication, finance, moving and assisting – and crucially the 'What matters to me' section. This details what matters to people, and what supports them with this.

In reviewing a sample of plans the inspector found that some were meaningful, detailed and current, and that others were not. In speaking with the teams involved she fed back that it was clear that the teams understood what mattered and how to support people, but that this was not always captured in 'My Life My Support Plan'. This was then discussed at the Quality and Compliance Group, which meets regularly, and has representation from throughout Supported Living.

What have you had to do differently and what made this possible?

In discussing this at the Quality and Compliance Group it was agreed that we needed to urgently address this. Our hope was to improve the quality of the support plans by reconnecting people to their purpose. As a result myself and two colleagues developed a workshop which aimed to do just that. This has since been rolled out to the majority of teams in Supported Living. The workshop is done within individual teams, and includes:

- What difference does support planning make? A discussion about what difference this makes for the person being supported and their team.
- A video from Open Futures Learning (online learning resource) with Dave Hingsburger talking about how important it is to speak the unique language of each person, particularly when the person does not use words but actions to communicate.
- Creating a section of their own support plan – participants are asked to think about and write down three things that matter to them, and what others would need to know in order to support them with this. This exercise highlights how important it is to understand this, the detail needed and how challenging it can be to talk about and capture these things.
- A video created by one of the people we support, talking about the impact of support planning in their life. Describing how important it is and also how challenging it is to discuss intimate details of your life and have this contained in a plan. It supports teams to understand that this must always be a respectful and sensitive process.

In terms of what made this possible:

- An imperative need to act based on the feedback from the Care Inspectorate, and given the importance of 'My Life My Support Plan' for people.
- The existence of the Quality and Compliance Group where it could be discussed and planned.
- Clarity and commitment amongst the Supported Living Leadership team that this needed to be prioritised, so that they could bring teams together to do the session.
- Finding and creating materials that were used in the workshop – this included the Communications Team, Supported Living Leadership and Thistle Learning.

Has this helped to keep a focus on what matters to people in face of current challenges?

Yes, this has helped us to powerfully reconnect with what matters to people, and to reconnect with our purpose in supporting people to live the life that works for them.

What have you noticed in terms of outcomes or impact? (for people using the service/staff/the organisation)

In terms of the teams who are supporting people these discussions have created energy and enthusiasm. It has also renewed their sense of purpose, as it allows staff to think more deeply about the difference their support makes to people. Having facilitated a number of these sessions with teams I can see individuals visibly changing before me – teams care deeply about the people they support and take pride in the work that they do. These sessions allow staff to take time to notice this again and be remotivated by it.

Where the people we support want to be they are involved in the session. This has resulted in the person themselves feeling more confident and valued, as they hear how much the team cares about them, understands them and values them.

How did this make you feel?

I have really enjoyed facilitating these sessions with teams. At Thistle we are passionate about increasing understanding of how skilled the work these teams do is, we often refer to the 'craft' of this work. These workshops have helped to reconnect teams with the craft of what they do, and the huge difference it makes to people's lives. It's been a real joy to see, particularly given the continuing lack of funding and recognition of Social Care by Government, and society more generally.

What have you learned through this?

I think this has been about relearning that focusing on why we do what we do (the outcomes) always results in increased motivation, understanding and joy. Despite the gruelling challenges the sector has faced in the last 5 years – COVID, cost of living crisis, funding crisis – there is real joy to be experienced when you see people living lives of meaning and purpose.

Anything else you want to tell us?

We need to do more to raise the profile of and understanding about social care, and the difference it makes. This should be seen as a positive career choice for young people leaving school, as well as more experienced people looking for a change to their work. Key to this is a better understanding of the skill of this work, and that it is valued through better pay. (See current campaign led by CCPS - [more than warm words | Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland](#))