

## Reflections on the experience of providing training and supervision

All three clinical psychologists commented that providing supervision and training was one of the most enjoyable and positive aspects of their involvement in the study. The overall perception was that the training was generally appropriate and well received. Many of the concepts introduced within the training were entirely novel for the lay therapists, and clinical psychologists commented upon their apparent anxiety concerning their ability to engage the service users and respond appropriately to them in this context. However, they appeared to find the training, and the promise of further supervision around the group, reassuring. The psychologists commented on how encouraging it was to observe the lay therapists' development over the course of the group, and to hear accounts of the service users' progress. Hearing the lay therapists express their intentions to continue running groups subsequent to the conclusion of the study was particularly positive.

One clinical psychologist commented upon the positive impact of her involvement with the lay therapists upon the standing of clinical psychology in her local area. She perceived that providing day service staff with practical training and supervision allowed her to demonstrate how psychological approaches could be applied within their services, and how these skills could be useful to their own practice. She believed that some staff were somewhat wary of clinical psychologists, and perhaps felt that the psychologist was something of an intruder, whose role was to criticise their practice. She perceived an element of scepticism among some staff regarding the potential for psychological interventions to be effective. However, the experience of working collaboratively with staff to deliver an intervention had made her appear less of an 'outsider' to some of the day centre staff, and more of a 'useful resource'. She felt that this was likely to enhance working relationships in the future across a variety of joint tasks.

However, some of the psychologists' reflections did highlight the more difficult aspects of implementing the group intervention within the day services. Often, these were related to the disparity between service requirements and service provision. Each clinician considered the key role of service constraints upon their experience of providing training and supervision to the lay therapists. All acknowledged that the issue of staff availability was particularly salient to the ease with which the group intervention could be implemented. In services where staff shortages were in evidence, there were difficulties in arranging training and supervision, and group sessions were often cancelled.

There was a perception among the clinical psychologists that the lay therapists were offered very few opportunities to engage in training of this nature. This may, at least in part, explain the reported difficulties in some centres surrounding the selection of lay therapists. Two of the clinical psychologists specifically commented upon the politics of this aspect of implementation. In particular, it seemed that 'qualified' support staff questioned the appropriateness of involving those staff without formal qualifications in facilitating the group intervention. This seemed to reflect their perception that the role of lay therapist required skills that were usually associated with their 'qualified' status. However, it also seemed to reflect their desire not to miss out on an opportunity for training, when such opportunities were sparse.

Of course, such difficulties are often embedded within the political climate of particular services, and undoubtedly the groups did not operate apart from these contextual influences. Negotiating the relationships between staff members within services was a significant issue for at least one of the clinical psychologists. Indeed, this seemed symptomatic of other systemic difficulties within the service itself. The ethos in a minority of services did not appear particularly supportive of the group intervention, and in at least one service the lay therapists facilitating the group experienced hostility from their colleagues and

disparaging comments regarding their efforts and the ongoing difficulties of some participants. Of course, this type of experience is particularly concerning because of the potential impact of such issues upon service users attending the centre.

In considering the actual process of supervision, it appeared that some of the lay therapists may have understood the term 'supervision' differently to the way in which it is typically used within clinical psychology. It seemed that some of the lay therapists had a relatively limited understanding of the supervision format, and indeed interpreted the term somewhat negatively, perhaps perceiving that the purpose of the supervision sessions was to enable the clinical psychologist to 'check up' on them. Other, perhaps more experienced or senior lay therapists, appeared to consider supervision a waste of their time. Thus, encouraging the lay therapists to use the supervision sessions for more reflective purposes was something of a developmental task over the course of each group. In some cases, using supervision for more reflective purposes was somewhat inhibited by difficulties in meeting the group of lay therapists together for supervision, a problem encountered by all three psychologists. Individual supervision sessions tended to yield different accounts of the group processes and progress, and without the opportunity to discuss these issues collaboratively, it was difficult to reach any consensus or resolution.

Interestingly, the clinical psychologists appeared to experience the supervision process somewhat differently. One found the therapists to be natural formulators, with an intuitive ability to engage in psychological thinking and little requirement for direction. Another commented that this appeared very difficult for the lay therapists in her area. The third found that these skills differed greatly from group to group, with some groups grasping the content of the sessions and working well to apply this appropriately to the needs of their own service users, and other groups requiring more guidance to consider how the material might be most usefully implemented.

## Reflections on predicted outcomes

On the basis of these reflections, the clinical psychologists identified the following points as the rationale for their predictions of which groups would have the best and worst outcomes (see *Table 58*). As reported in *Chapter 9*, these predictions were confirmed with respect to the fidelity with which the intervention was delivered, and identified trends in the clinical outcomes.

### *What made groups more successful?*

- Service users who were enthusiastic and engaged.
- Service users who were more cognitively able.
- Groups in which service users and staff were from a single service.
- Groups who developed a shared group identity and positive relationships.
- Groups that ran as scheduled.
- Lay therapists who had volunteered themselves, rather than been volunteered by their managers.
- Lay therapists who were prepared for the sessions and willing to take an active role.
- Lay therapists who could see the 'bigger picture' and could understand how the skills developed in the group could be used in everyday contexts, both for themselves and for the service users.
- Lay therapists who engaged with supervision and were reflective in their approach.
- Groups who were supported by thoughtful and committed day service managers.
- Groups being run within supportive services, with a positive attitude towards the potential for change.

### *What made groups less successful?*

- Overstretched services.
- Groups that were largely unscheduled (ran according to availability of staff rather than according to a specific timetable).
- Groups in which service users had markedly varied levels of cognitive ability.
- Groups in which the lay therapists were selected because of simple availability or because of their own development needs, rather than because of their inherent suitability for the task.
- Groups involving individuals from more than one service.