

Back to you – It works

DISC



Project Synopsis

Engage is a behavioural change programme to support offenders with engagement into mainstream education, training and employment. Using a range of therapies DISC sought to reintegrate offenders in society. The project developed an innovative programme to address the problem of engagement and progression for ex-offenders with substance misuse and social exclusion issues.

Overall this report has found that all of the Project Aims have been met throughout the delivery of the project and the service users involved with the project have stated that they found it very useful in terms of their progression towards employment, training or education.

Project Aims

The project develops an innovative programme to address the sector-wide problem of engagement and progression for ex-offenders with substance misuse and social exclusion issues. The key aims of the project are:

- Reduce Reoffending behaviour of persistent, prolific offenders (PPO)
- Provide a support network for offenders serving less than 12 month prison sentences for when they are released into the community
- Engage offenders in positive activities to support independence and increase opportunities for social inclusion.
- Provide best practice in engaging the hardest to help clients with offending history and share with other local providers of education, training and employment initiatives.
- Develop transition and progression pathways for offender groups.

Engaging ex-offenders onto career development programmes is always challenging. DISC are working towards combating deprivation and promoting social inclusion. We have found that some of our learners were asking for ongoing support throughout stabilising their drug use, addressing their social exclusion and tackling their offending behaviour. The Engage programme seeks to offer this support whilst supporting the transition into mainstream services.

Engage is a motivational behavioural change programme for the hardest to help groups. DISC have delivered this intervention to substance misusers and NEET young people in the past. Many of the learners have substance misuse issues, are stable but are not engaging with training, education and employment services, or re-integrating into the community. The programme was originally developed by DISC, our partner agencies and our service users when some of our drugs service users told us that they wanted to avoid mixing with chaotic drug users in drug treatment centres and asked for help finding suitable community venues to meet. They wanted to get themselves into a position where they felt confident and skilled enough to apply for training and work opportunities. This programme has extended the learning from the

original substance misuse and young people's programme to support the specific needs of ex-offenders.

Each step of the Engage programme builds upon the acknowledgment that as individuals we all have the power within ourselves to make considered and long lasting life changes. The Human Givens Emotional Needs Assessment Tool highlights any needs which are not currently being met with regards to employment, training and education. The programme challenges individuals to examine themselves closely in order to meet their needs in a productive and positive way. A series of workbooks, group work sessions and one to one coaching and support, aim to move people through the process of working towards meeting their unmet needs using a range of therapeutic interventions. The programme runs for 12 weeks and links innovative physical activities to the modules of learning to underpin a learner's development. For example, the first session links the need for learners to take control by setting their own specific goals for the short, medium and long term. After the theory session learners are taken to archery classes to practically see the importance of hitting their target goals.

Project Delivery

Processes of Innovation involved in the Engage programme included some of the following areas:

- **Learner Criteria:** Current systems within Offender Management do not support or address the needs of short-term prisoners serving less than 12 months. As they are not under supervision in the community upon release they do not get access to mainstream Probation Employment, Training and Education services. Based on this knowledge and through consultation with West Yorkshire Probation Trust this provision was put in place in order to add value to existing services and support a long term strategy to develop new methodologies to support this group of offenders.
- **Through the Gate Intervention:** Our project engages offenders during the resettlement period of their prison sentence. Recruiting from within the prison enables us to identify directly the prisoners that will not have community supervision via the Probation Service and enables us to establish a working relationship prior to release. This approach enables DISC to identify support needs prior to release and follow these through in the community, but most importantly gain the trust of the offender by building a bespoke support programme prior to release to ensure immediate implementation in the community. DISC currently have working relationships with HMP Leeds, Doncaster, Everthorpe, Northallerton and Newhall.
- **Therapies and Training:** The Engage programme uses a mixture of therapies and training to enable participants to reflect on their lives, change their values, take responsibility, reduce re-offending and substance misuse, make positive career and life choices and move on in a positive direction. The training includes information, advice and guidance (IAG) and employability. Therapies used include rational emotional therapy, motivational interviewing, Neuro-Linguistic Programming and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. By using a blend of therapies all of the participants are engaged visually, auditory or kinaesthetically. The course inspires participants to change the way they behave and progress.
- **Out of Programme Learner Contact:** The strength of the relationships between workers and participants on the programme was a factor highlighted throughout the consultation period for the programme. However, a number of elements relating to the relationship were identified as particularly interesting, such as the way that workers from the programme maintained contact through regular text messaging and phone calls. As one stakeholder stated: *"Most services would not show that concern for the people they are working with."* This was, he suggested, one of the key reasons that the programme had made such a

positive impact with the learners: *“They should be praised for the way they deal with the people who they work with and the fact that they do stay in close contact with those people”*.

- **The taxi service:** The taxi service that the programme provides to those attending was identified as an interesting piece of practice. The taxi is booked by the programme workers and will be sent to the learners’ homes. A number of stakeholders emphasised the importance of this in terms of empowering the learner, providing them with the choice of using the taxi and accessing the programme. For a number of stakeholders, the use of the taxi service was emblematic of the service itself. One stakeholder stated that it was about *“choice, empowerment and responsibility”*.
- **The ‘Holding’ Group:** In order to maintain motivation for learners that had been referred to the programme, but for whom there was not yet an available programme for them access, a ‘holding group’ was developed. The holding group ensured that learners were supported prior to the programme being made available and also enabled them to build a relationship with programme workers: the aim being to maintain motivation.
- **Engaging with Ex-Participants from the Programme:** Workers from the programme maintain informal contact with participants from the programme once they have completed. This is done through a simple text message that is sent to all participants and ex-participants from the programme once a week. At times this has enabled past participants to re-engage with those delivering the programme for support.
- **The Journal and use of Cameras:** The use of methods such as journals, workbooks and cameras were both identified as examples of interesting practice. The journal is related to the progression of the learner throughout the programme and tracks their successes and achievements along the way.

Unfortunately, as discussed within the Interim Report for this project difficulties were encountered with the recruitment of workers at the start of the project. This was due to the suitability of the applicants rather than any particular weaknesses in the actual recruitment process. The posts were advertised and several candidates were interviewed for the posts however, all candidates were unsuccessful throughout two separate recruitment drives. We felt that due to the nature of this particular contract and taking into account the nature of the client group, the successful candidate would need specialist knowledge and experience. Two project workers were successfully recruited in June 2010 and commenced their employment with DISC in July 2010. This however had an effect on the key milestones up until this point. It also had a knock on effect on the commencement dates for cohorts 2-5. We therefore took the action of running two cohorts of learners concurrently to ensure that the total number of learners accessing the service was not compromised.

Project Outcomes

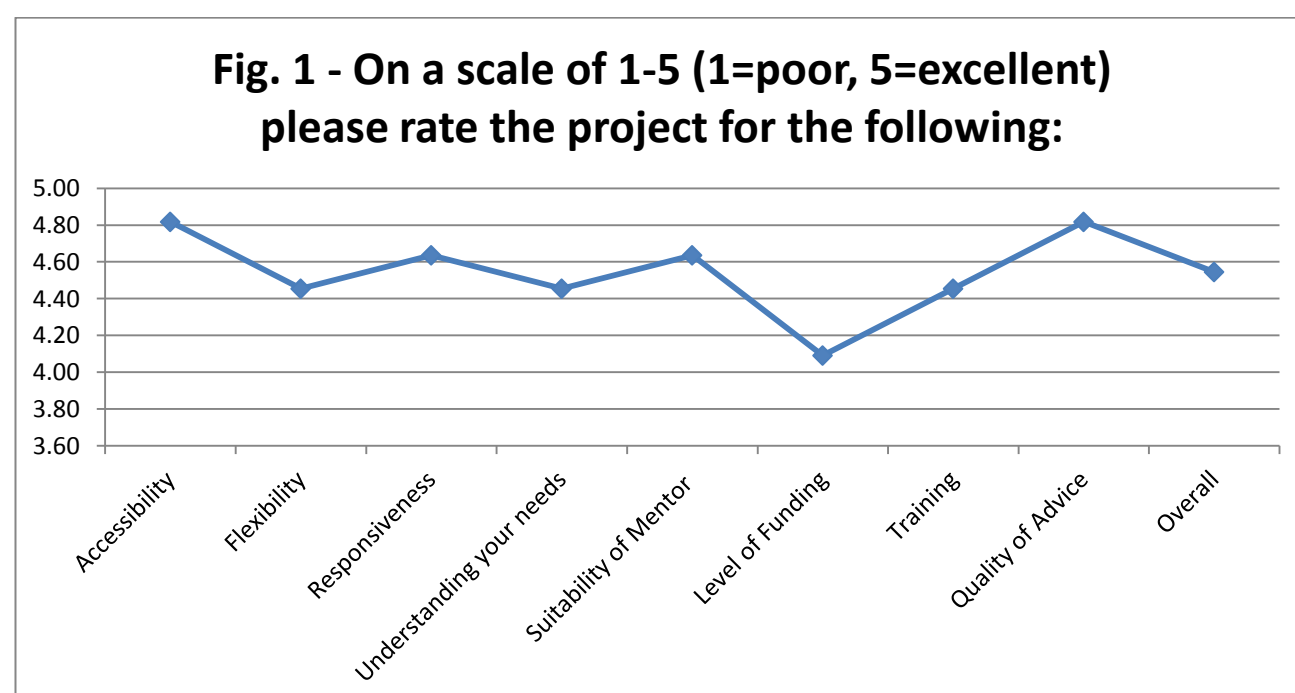
There were no perceived changes in the Project’s aims and/or delivery methods were implemented throughout the lifetime of the project. However, a small ‘tweak’ was made in order to achieve our milestones due to the issue that occurred with the recruitment of suitable staff as mentioned above.

A sample of 24 service users who participated in the Engage programme have been asked to complete a Project Evaluation questionnaire. We were unable to establish contact with a small number of service users despite repeated attempts. This evaluation activity was designed to gather qualitative and quantitative data in order to evaluate the success of the project from our Service User’s perspective and also to inform future activity. The evaluation questionnaire template can be found at Appendix 1.

The average age range of the service users taking part in the evaluation was between 25-40. The service users were asked to categorise their economic circumstances in a number of ways, ranging from unemployed, studying and employed. The largest group of respondents (58%) stated that they were unemployed (and able to work) prior to becoming involved with Engage. 21% of respondents stated that they were unemployed (and unable to work) and a further 21% being in custody prior to attending the programme. In terms of their current circumstances the majority of service users had moved in to some form of training or education (58%). 17% of the service users were undertaking voluntary work and 33% were classed as 'Other' which included peer mentoring programmes with the Leeds Community Drugs Partnership, Awaiting a start on a Detox Programme, Engaging with mainstream provision such as Progress2Work, Awaiting funding for self-employment and Completed CSCS card and actively seeking employment. Only 4% of the service users had reoffended. This is an extremely positive outcome for the programme and shows that we have been successful in achieving a number of the project aims of:

- Reduce Reoffending behaviour of persistent, prolific offenders (PPO's)
- Provide a support network for offenders serving less than 12 month prison sentences for when they are released into the community
- Engage offenders in positive activities to support independence and increase opportunities for social inclusion.
- Provide best practice in engaging the hardest to help clients with offending history and share with other local providers of education, training and employment initiatives.
- Develop transition and progression pathways for offender groups.

Service users were asked to rate the support that they have received from the Project across a variety of areas. (Fig 1). Overall, the project was rated very highly by the service users, with a large proportion rating the support as 4.5 on average. In terms of the project areas rated as excellent (5), the highest rated element of the project support was the quality of advice provided to the service users throughout the programme followed by the accessibility of the project. The level of funding was the lowest scoring area which when questioned the general response around the score being low was due to the fact that the project was only funded for 12 months as the service users felt that it had been so valuable for them they would have liked to have seen it continue.



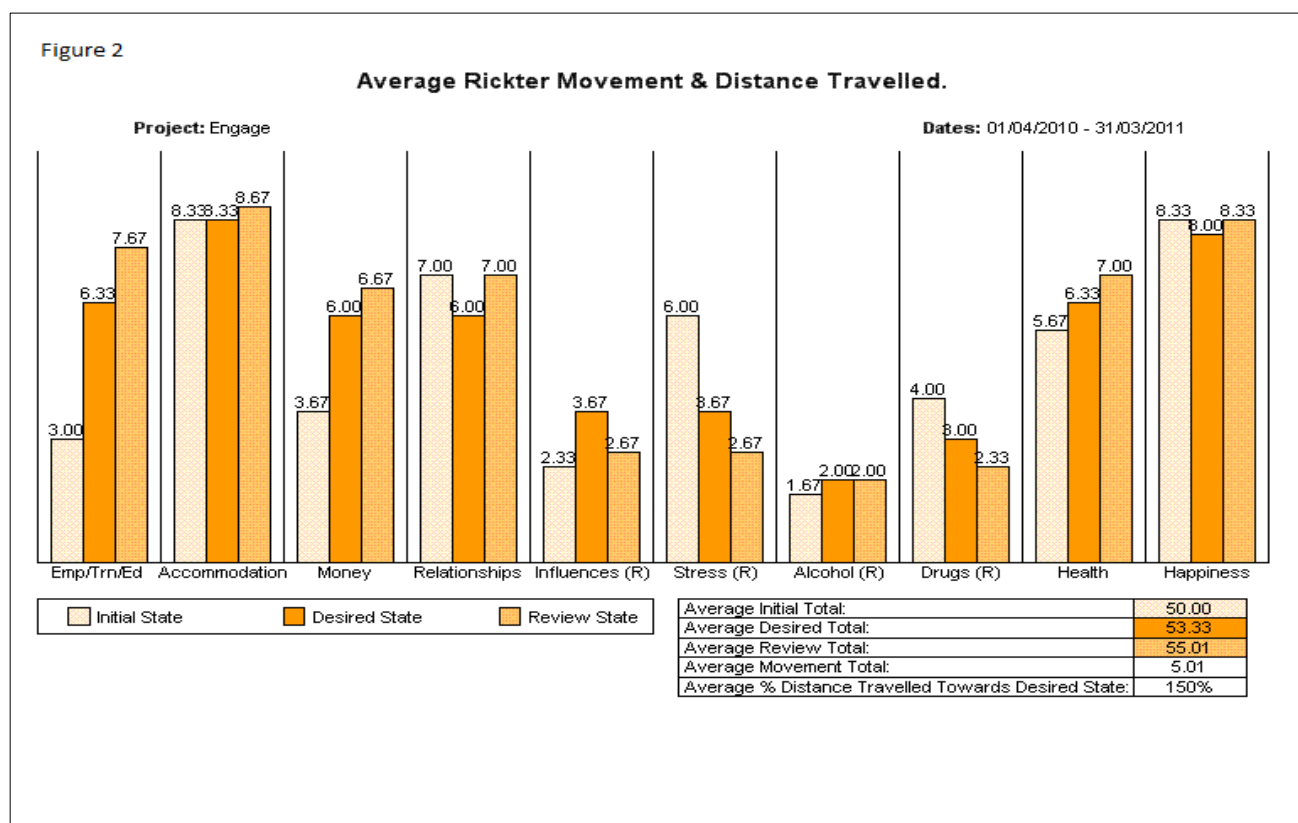
Engage service users were asked to highlight three areas the Project had done well. The group work and the activities which linked in with the group work were a success amongst the service users. The support provided by the Project Workers was also a key area of success from the point of view of the beneficiaries with 55% of service users stating that they were supportive and responsive to their needs.

The service users were also asked to make suggestions as to how they thought the project could have been improved. The majority of people stated that they would like to see the project continue post March 2011 as they felt that it was a very worthwhile scheme. Other suggestions included the possibility of embedding volunteering opportunities within the 12 week programme structure to allow the service users to gain some work experience prior to starting on more mainstream provision following the Engage programme. Two participants suggested that they would have like to attend more groups as they found it very useful in terms of changing their offending behaviour and ways of thinking.

Finally, the service users were asked what they thought they would be doing now if they had not completed the Engage programme. 100% of the service users responded stating that they think they would be in the same position they were in prior to completing the Engage programme. Some of the responses were 'Nothing', 'Still unemployed', 'a bit lost', 'bored at home', still using drugs', 'a lot less employable', 'in a very bad place' and 'on my own with no support'.

Beneficiary case studies have been developed throughout the lifetime of the project. This has helped to provide realistic achievable role model examples. Agreement was sought and obtained from the individuals who populate the case studies. An example of these case studies can be found at Appendix 2.

Figure 2 below documents the overall progression of all 60 participants on the project. It clearly shows that they have made significant progress in all areas of their lifestyles which has enabled them to move in to and sustain engagement with more mainstream training/education/employment providers.



Sharing of Project Findings

A steering group of key stakeholders was established for the project and took responsibility for disseminating best practice across the sector in the delivery area. The steering group was made up of agencies and projects such as DISC, West Yorkshire Probation Service, West Yorkshire Police, Leeds Drugs Intervention Project, Drugs Rehabilitation Requirement Programme and the Integrated Offender Management Service.

Monthly performance statistics from MI Systems was collated and shared with key stakeholders and the Steering Group. Organisations referring into and supporting DISC with progression and transition were also included in the distribution of data. In addition, a monthly case study was produced tracking the journey of a specific learner from referral to progression.

Appendix 1

Engage Project Participation Evaluation

Name:
Age:
Ethnicity:

Accessibility	
Flexibility	
Responsiveness	
Understanding your needs	
Suitability of mentor	
Level of funding	
Training	
Quality of advice	
Overall	

1. What are you doing now?

Studying - school/college	1	Unemployed (able to work)	7
Other training	2	Unemployed (not able to work)	8
Employed (Part time)	3	Voluntary work	9
Employed (Full time)	4	Retired	10
Self-employed	5	Prefer not say (e.g. in custody)	11
Caring for children/other family	6	Other (please state)	12

Other:

2. What were you doing prior to receiving support from the Engage project?

Studying - school/college	1	Unemployed (able to work)	7
Other training	2	Unemployed (not able to work)	8
Employed (Part time)	3	Voluntary work	9
Employed (Full time)	4	Retired	10
Self-employed	5	Prefer not say (e.g. in custody)	11
Caring for children/other family	6	Other (please state)	12

Other:

3. How did you first hear about DISC's Engage Programme?

Probation Officer	1	
Drug Treatment Provider	2	<i>Which?</i>
Prison	3	<i>Which?</i>
Jobcentre Plus	4	
Friends/Family	5	
Leaflet	6	
DISC Website	7	
Other	8	<i>Please state:</i>

4. On a scale of 1-5 (1 = Poor and 5 = Excellent) please rate the project for the following:

5. Can you list up to 3 things that you think the project did really well?

1:

2:

3:

6. Can you list 3 things that you think might improve the project?

1:

2:

3:

7. How did you benefit from your involvement with the project? (E.g. confidence, reality check, personal development etc)

8. What do you think you would be doing now without the support of the project/DISC?

Appendix 2

N is a 34 year old service user on the Engage Programme. N was referred to the Engage programme by his Drugs Worker on the DRR (Drug Rehabilitation Requirement) project. N was involved with DRR due to his long-term Heroin and Crack Cocaine use which has caused his offending behaviour. N had recently been released from prison and has been within the Criminal Justice System for the majority of his life. N was also awaiting a court date for crimes which had been committed prior to becoming involved with the Engage programme. N also suffers with Hepatitis C and depression is unemployed and did not have stable accommodation at the start of the programme.

A comprehensive initial assessment was carried out between N and his Engage Project Worker at the start of the programme to identify his individual needs and to look at the areas we could support him with. The initial assessment looked at all areas of N's life and lifestyle and includes a 'Target Assessment' whereby the service user plots on a chart where they feel they are in terms of Employment, Accommodation, Money, Relationships, Influences, Stress, Alcohol, Drugs, Health and Happiness. The service user is asked to score each area out of 10 (10 being the highest) at the start, mid-way point and end of the programme so that their progression in each area can be measured and documented effectively. N scored all areas as a '3' on average. The initial assessment identified four key areas which N needed support with. These areas were substance misuse, improving relationships especially with family, housing and employment/training. A detailed action plan was drawn up and agreed between both parties.

The Engage Project Worker worked with N and liaised with his Drugs Worker to support him with stabilising his drug use and beginning a Methadone programme. Within three weeks of the Engage programme N was providing negative drug test samples and this then led to him beginning a Reduction Programme with this Doctor to reduce on Methadone by 5ml every fortnight which, with the support of his Engage worker he was successful in achieving.

At the half-way stage of the project N's court case was held and the sentence received was suspended for one year in light of the good work and progress that N had made with all areas of his lifestyle on the Engage programme.

N always attended groups session and only missed one 1-to-1 session due to illness showing an excellent commitment to the programme. Within the group work setting N learnt about his feelings of inferiority and looked at ways to improve his outlook on life. He also did a lot of work around confidence and self-esteem which made him able to believe in himself and his ability to change. N went on to complete all of the group work sessions within the programme structure and addressed his feelings and emotions. N looked at his offending behaviour and ways in which he could change and manage any triggers for his offending and substance abuse. With the support of his Engage Project Worker N put strategies in place to help him cope. N showed a real understanding and depth in the group work, he applied himself well and the first booklet he completed painted a dark picture of him and his life as it was then. Later workbooks displayed significant change in his ways of thinking and general behaviour. For example, N completed an exercise in which approximately 100 of words are printed on a page and N was asked to circle how many he thought were relevant to him. At the end of the exercise N had circled more than 70 of the words and every one of the words were positive to which he looked back at the previous page and smiled. He felt an amazing feeling of self worth and realised that sometimes he was too hard on himself and genuinely thought he was beginning to like the person he had recently become.

Towards the end of the programme, N and his Engage Project Worker started to look at accommodation. As N's family relationships were now much improved due to the positive

progression and complete abstinence from drugs. His parents allowed him to move back in to the family home which allowed him to begin his course of treatment for Hepatitis C.

Following completion of the Engage programme N was extremely keen to continue working towards his overall long-term goal of finding sustainable employment. His Engage Project Worker referred him to the Progress2Work programme; a mainstream programme for people who have found substance abuse and/or offending to be a barrier to them finding employment. The Progress2Work programme has subsequently referred N to a training provider where he has done work to improve his literacy and numeracy skills and has also gained a Fork Lift Truck Licence. N is now continuing to engage with Progress2Work and is working on Employability skills to enable him to find sustainable employment in the near future.

Below is the completed Target Assessment for N which documents his progression in each area of the assessment.

