

## Thinking outside the box

A new type of worker is needed in the post treatment phase, says **Jim McCartney**



**IT IS NO LONGER VIABLE** for us to merely rehabilitate people – we must also help them grow. Think of a bicycle – rehabilitation is the chain-set and pedals that keeps the person moving through a programme. Development is the back wheel that helps you move faster and more effectively and reach your destination. Rehabilitation has a time limit – development is limitless.

I find the concept of residential and structured day programmes unsound. It can become vague terminology, leaving a blind spot to the ongoing development that is needed when the treatment programme concludes and the funding terminates. They can provide a false hope of having reached the mountain summit, when in reality the climb has only just begun. It is especially the case for people with low cognitive ability, a chronic history of rebelling against the system, joblessness and a protracted pattern of criminality. Yet the right workforce with the right skills can help such people become empowered and liberated.

For over 20 years I have worked with people living outside society's norms. It's important for us to differentiate between those who are living in poverty and those who are the victims of a deviant lifestyle, resulting in behaviours and attitudes that have cut them off from the social systems that sustain most of us each day. There is considerable literature written by psychologists and experts on human behaviour, but not much written for the worker on the frontline. It does not help the project worker who has to motivate change.

For some time I have argued that there is a need for a new type of worker schooled in a multidisciplinary approach to developing people. The post treatment phase needs investment in a highly competent workforce equipped with motivational skills that transcend those of counsellor and psychotherapist.

Effective developers of people are few and far between, and this new type of worker needs to be a leader with knowledge of strategic coaching and cultivating growth. They need to be able to prepare the service user for the complex culture of a workplace made up of interpersonal dynamics that can make or break vulnerable people – especially those with a tendency to rebel against the social system.

Complex and hard-to-reach groups can provide the worker with a platform for personal innovation and an opportunity to develop new skills. However, this worker must be willing to embrace a journey of inner discovery that requires continuous learning – much of it taking place within an informal setting. They must also be prepared to change their mindset and be willing to think outside

the box, as this is how innovation is created.

It's now a year since I set up the Academy within THOMAS and it has confirmed my belief that we need a tremendous amount of leadership on the frontline of service delivery. Service users need to be able to believe that the worker can cultivate their growth and development.

People are often encouraged to find work after treatment ends, but many service users have a limited history of work and need to be equipped with the necessary social and emotional intelligence to deal with the social system of the workplace. Over the years I have watched us tick boxes and get people into work only for them to relapse within a few weeks. The workplace is a social system that can make or break people.

Joseph Nye, the distinguished Harvard professor and political scientist, has written quite extensively on the theory of power. His concept of SMART power – a combination of 'hard' and 'soft' power – provides an interesting starting place for this new type of worker. Nye develops the view that hard power – the carrot and stick approach – does not always work and compares it to the Bush administration in its dealings with Iraq and Afghanistan. This type of power is harsh – but sometimes you get the result you don't intend.

Soft power can become more attractive – this is based on your powers of attraction, where people are inspired by what you have to offer and see that it's in their best interest to conform. With this approach you can get better results than hard power – but it's a different dynamic, demanding more from the worker, and can be a longer process.

Many people we work with in the drug and alcohol treatment sector have become the recipients of hard power – such as the police, the courts and the prison system. Drug and alcohol treatment programmes also exercise hard power with their focus on conformity.

Of course we need hard power, but at the same time we need a workforce skilled in the attributes of soft power and the charisma of leadership, where followers are convinced by the persona of the project worker so that the transformational process is able to continue.

One of the key challenges we face is equipping a workforce with these multifaceted skills.

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