

Using capacity thinking...

'About Me' booklets

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'About me' booklets

A useful element of person centred planning can be the production of a booklet 'about me'. This is rarely the most important result of a good planning process, but it can still be an extremely valuable document.

Producing a booklet can capture some of the most important information from the planning process - in a form that can more easily be accessed by people who weren't present. It can provide a challenge to other deficiency based paperwork, by supporting a capacity viewpoint, and ensuring that the person is seen as an individual not a 'client', 'resident', or 'patient'. A well written booklet can help to safeguard the focus person's individuality, backing up their preferences and choices in writing, by providing something of a step by step guide. It can also help with the coordination of future planning or help with developing an understanding of the focus person.

It is essential that a booklet is written from a capacity viewpoint. It should be positive, human, and engaging. This can be a real challenge for a facilitator to deliver. Even those closest to the focus person may feel that the most important facts about the person are their deficiency labels. And in describing details the booklet can quickly make the person seem 'different' rather than engaging the reader in a positive and human way. It should be jargon free (or at least explain any jargon), and it should be label free.

Most importantly a booklet should be flexible and up to date - you might like to think of it more as a workbook. We all change our minds and move on in life therefore this document must be very easy to update.

Think carefully about the use of the first person in the booklet. If the person is able to agree to what is written or to dictate it, the use of the first person in the text may be coherent. Using the person's first name throughout may be better. You may have to say things like "people who know X think that she..." or "we believe that" but this discipline ensures that everyone keeps questioning and improving the information.

Sections

The sections of a support booklet could include

- a title page
- a section capturing a capacity viewpoint of the person
- a section on the future
- details about supporting the person, or communication
- a section outlining issues which aren't resolved.

Commonly, the front page of a support booklet uses a simple title like "About Me", "About Jane", or "What you need to know about me" and includes a photograph. The choice of photograph can be very important.

Capacity viewpoint

To try to capture a capacity viewpoint you might start with the heading 'Introduction' or 'About Me'/'About Jane' or 'Who I am'/'Who Jane is'. This section might be divided up into sub-sections but in essence it attempts to introduce the focus person. There are many different ways to write this. It might be useful to include:

- words people use to describe me
- what people say about me
- people who are important to me
- things I'm good at
- things I do for others
- where I come from (my story)
- my gifts.

Future plans

One aim of having information written in a support booklet is to make sure that those supporting a person formally, or as family or through friendship, are working together towards a future desired by the focus person. To help with this it may be useful to include details about the person's dreams and aspirations or even their nightmares. It may also be useful to give an account of what activity is currently being undertaken in working towards this desired future.

Here we aren't thinking of an account of day to day activity. Instead, this is about making sure that progress on plans for change is coordinated (where the focus person isn't able or likely to do this verbally).

Details about supporting the person

It can be useful for a booklet to include a section on this theme. There are many ways to organise the section. It might be entitled "To be successful in supporting me..." or "It would really help Jane if you could...". It might be good to describe those things that are essential (non-negotiable) to the person, important to them, and important likes and dislikes. Details about the person's daily routines might help to ensure consistency in support.

It is particularly important to remember that this section is also about the future, about how the person needs things to be, not about recording what currently happens. It is about what does and doesn't make sense to the person, not what is provided within the available budget.

With this section there is a risk of giving a reader the impression that the person is 'different', when our objective is actually to engage them in a human way and to provide a capacity perspective. A second risk is that what is written may be misunderstood or might come to restrict the person's freedom. It must be very carefully written.

Details about communication

Sometimes it can be useful for a booklet to describe information about how someone communicates. This might be about giving new support staff or new friends some tips, or about making sure that essential information is entirely clear to everyone. This section can be very important in ensuring that the person is enabled to control their day-to-day life.

A separate reason for including this section can be where the focus person's allies or support staff are struggling to understand the person's communication. The booklet can provide a tool to use to collect evidence and ideas.

Once again, this section must be very carefully written.

Unresolved issues

Occasionally it can be constructive to include a section in a support booklet to describe unresolved issues. It might, for instance, be useful for everyone to know where there is uncertainty, or where the focus person's family, friends and allies are struggling to understand important information, or where they have different opinions. Written well, this section can be used as a tool enabling understanding and agreement to develop.

There are also many occasions on which including such a section would be counterproductive or divisive.