Introduction

In everyday environments information is often provided in a written format, e.g. signs, instructions and directions. This level of visual information can often be too complex for individuals with Learning Disabilities (LD), which in turn leads to a breakdown in communication and understanding.

Communication difficulties are found to be a significant barrier to achieving key outcomes around participation, equality and independence for individuals with LD as detailed in national policies such as ‘Same as you’ (2000), ‘Keys to Life’ (2013) and the National Health and Social Care Standards (2017). This can lead to negative effects as demonstrated in the Winterbourne Report (2012), which exposed the inequalities and abuse that can result from insufficient support.

In response to this, the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) devised the Five Good Communication Standards. This project focused on Standard 4: “Services create opportunities, relationships and environments that make individuals want to communicate”.

Aims

- To increase the use of symbols used as signage within an identified Renfrewshire Learning Disability Day service by August 2017.
- To develop a bank of symbols related to activities that take place within an identified Renfrewshire Learning Disability Day service by August 2017.
- To create an agreed process for adding to the symbol bank with an identified Learning Disability Day services by August 2017.

Method

In order to achieve the aims a pre and post checklist was created. The initial scope of the environment highlighted that whilst there was some visual signage, this was used only as universal signage and was not relevant to the activities that the service users were taking part in. For example, the doors had images such as art (see image 2) however the image did not always match or describe the activity that was taking place in the room e.g. ladies pamper session in the art room.

Nine rooms within the centre were identified as benefiting from visual signage. As none of the original signage consistently explained what activity was taking place in that room, it was determined that a list of all the activities that were carried out within the centre was needed. This list would be used to create a bank of symbols relating to these activities which could be placed on the door or on the timetable for the centre to allow service users to determine where they are going for each activity. The aim of this was to increase participation by allowing service users to independently access the activities that they want to take part in, as in line with the outcomes of the national policies. It would also increase service user choice and had the potential to make it easier for service users to give their opinions about the activities.

Consistency

We worked with staff within the day service in consultation with service users to agree the symbol and size of each activity. These were then used to create a bank of symbols for use. The symbols were used and stored in a folder that was accessible to staff. The symbols were also categorised for ease of use. This management input with support helped ensure staff were committed to the project. A core group of service users were also involved in helping staff put the symbols on the doors. This has helped create ownership within the service and it is hoped this will increase the longevity of use.

Feedback

‘I found Art!’

‘When I was asking ‘Joe’ if his group was in room 1 or 2, he was able to point at the picture and head into the room himself.’

Results

As universal signage was deemed to consistently meet the use of a true ‘pre and post’ measurement, it was difficult to determine the quantitative improvement. However, the use of symbols was monitored over a 5 week period post intervention to measure the consistency of use. In order to reduce bias the data was collected on random unannounced visits to the day centre over the 5 week period, from the results (see Table 1 below)

Week 1 demonstrated a 62.5% use of symbols. Week 2 showed a 20% improvement by having 8 out of 9 rooms displaying symbols. Week 3 and 4 had 100% usage throughout the 9 rooms in use within the centre. From this it can be determined that appropriate symbols were consistently used over the 5 week period. A percentage calculation was applied as some of the rooms may not have been in use at the time. Overall it must be acknowledged that these are initial observations and that continued monitoring and support in implementing the symbols is being provided by SLT.

Conclusion

To be meaningful and helpful to adults with learning disabilities who have a reduced ability to understand, signage has to use symbols which are relevant, familiar and consistently used. Achieving this is often difficult for practical reasons, such as lack of resources and failure to address issues of sustainability. This project worked with a learning disability day service to demonstrate how these problem could be solved. The results have demonstrated that meaningful signage increases participation and can be achieved. Understanding of roles and responsibilities and the development of a pathway that can be used to ensure sustainability are important factors for success.

References

