

A cluster randomised controlled trial to test Who's Challenging Who



RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Who's Challenging Who staff training intervention led to improvements in some secondary outcomes (staff attitudes, and work motivation) but no statistically significant effect for the primary outcome (staff empathy), or setting outcomes (recorded incidents of challenging behaviour or use of restrictive practices such as restraint).

The direct use of the experience of people with learning disability was perceived as strength of WCW (by staff and by trainers).

Practitioners should work with people with learning disabilities to co-design and deliver training for staff as a part of workforce strategies developed in response to the Transforming Care Policy Programme and similar initiatives.

The selection and training of people with learning disabilities, their role in co-producing WCW, and their success in delivering the training to a high standard are other unique contributions of this study.



BACKGROUND

The behaviours and attitudes of support staff can trigger the challenging behaviours of people with learning disabilities, or make these challenging behaviours worse (Hastings et al. 2013). A systematic review of staff training literature in learning disability settings identified no existing evidence-based training course to increase empathy and to change support staff attitudes towards those with challenging behaviour (e.g., MacDonald and McGill 2013). Meta-syntheses of existing qualitative research on the experiences of people with learning disability and their carers also identified the need for training for staff focused on empathy and attitude change (Griffith et al. 2013, Griffith and Hastings 2014).

The primary aim of this research was to assess the effectiveness of the WCW staff training course to increase the empathy towards people with challenging behaviours of social care staff working in residential settings for people with a learning disability, compared with a waiting list control group, using a cluster randomised controlled (RCT) design.

THE INTERVENTION

Who's Challenging Who? (WCW) is a training intervention aiming to improve staff understanding of the experiences of people with learning disabilities whose behaviour was described as challenging (i.e., staff empathy) and staff attitudes towards this group.

WCW is not a training course about academic or practice perspectives on 'challenging behaviour', but is entirely focused on what people with learning disabilities want to communicate about their experience of challenging behaviour.

Methods

A RCT of 118 residential settings for people with learning disability and challenging behaviour, allocated to receive WCW or to be offered WCW 5–6 months later, was carried out between 2015 and 2017. WCW was co-produced with people with learning disability and delivered by people with learning disability. The training course, lasting half a day, was delivered by people with learning disability. Staff empathy, attitudinal, and work well-being outcomes were measured (two from each setting, total 236 staff), and recorded incidents of challenging behaviour and the use of restrictive intervention practices were measured for each residential setting.

Outcomes were assessed at baseline (before randomisation) and at 6 and 20 weeks post-randomisation. A nested qualitative study focused on interviews with 13 staff who attended WCW training and with all four WCW trainers (including those with learning disability).



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Given the lack of an evidence-based training course designed to improve the understanding of others' perspectives (empathy) and attitudes of staff in learning disability services, the current research further developed and then robustly tested the WCW half-day training course the research team had piloted previously (Hutchinson et al. 2014).

REVIEW OF THE WCW COURSE

In the first phase of the current project, new trainers with learning disability whose behaviour had been labelled as challenging were recruited. The project team worked together with these new trainers to co-produce a revised version of the WCW course. Most changes focused on introducing the personal experiences and perspectives of the new trainers, including new video material.

Two significant changes were made to WCW:

1. The trainers with learning disability were considered the lead trainer with support offered by a trainer without learning disability. In the pilot project, the two trainers co-delivered WCW.
2. A post-course coaching element was added to the training. At the end of the WCW course, participants develop a short Action Plan for their work setting, identifying a small number of changes they plan to make after taking part in WCW. Two 30 minute follow-on telephone coaching sessions were developed to assist setting managers to plan how they would share the Action Plan with the whole of their staff group, to establish a strategy for the implementation of the Action Plan, and to problem-solve barriers that emerged during this process.

The revised WCW training is designed to be delivered to small groups of staff (up to 12), with two staff from each residential setting (one manager/lead staff member, one other staff member), over a half-day session. Staff from

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different settings train together. The content of the training covers six key topics that address broad issues of experience and that include the perspectives of the individual trainer:

- communication, and how staff listening can prevent escalation of challenging behaviour
- how the living environment contributes to frustration and thus to challenging behaviour
- the experience of being physically restrained
- what it is like to be on medication “for” challenging behaviour
- experiences of feeling excluded because of challenging behaviour
- the unhelpful attitudes and behaviour of support staff, alongside a discussion of positive qualities that contribute to good support/care.

RANDOMISED CONTROLLED TRIAL

118 service settings were successfully recruited and randomised; all of which were providing 24-hour support to between 1 and 10 people with learning disability, including at least one person with aggressive challenging behaviour. 59 settings were assigned by chance to attend WCW training, with the remaining 59 settings being offered WCW training after the research follow-up point 20 weeks later. Two staff from each setting (total 236 staff) were recruited into the research. Staff and setting outcomes were collected at baseline (prior to randomisation), and at 6 (post-training), and 20 weeks after randomisation.

Overall, service settings had on average nine full-time staff and four part-time staff. On average, 68% of people with learning disability in each setting had displayed recent challenging behaviour. Staff members

were a mean age of 40 years, the majority were female (77%), and white (89%). Staff had worked in health or social care typically for 11 years, with people with learning disabilities for 9.5 years, and in their current role for 2.3 years. The majority of staff in the study worked full-time (89%).

Audio recordings of each WCW training session were carefully coded. WCW was delivered to a high standard by the trainers with learning disability: they delivered on average 98% of required WCW training components.

Keeping social care staff in the research study to complete outcome measures was a challenge, with 56% of staff completing questionnaires at the 20 week follow-up.

The study outcomes were analysed with appropriate statistical tests taking into a number of key factors that might have affected the findings.

There was a non-significant, small effect, difference in Staff Empathy for people with Challenging Behaviour Questionnaire (SECBQ) scores (primary outcome) in favour of the WCW arm of the trial at 20 weeks post-randomisation.

WCW led to improvements in some secondary outcomes (staff Empowerment attitudes at 6 and 20 week follow-up, Positive Work Motivation at 6 weeks, work-related Personal Accomplishment at 20 weeks), but not setting outcomes (recorded incidents of challenging behaviour or restrictive practices, both measured at 20 weeks).

QUALITATIVE STUDY

In a nested qualitative study, interviews were carried out with 13 staff who had attended the WCW training (including 7 managers) and all four WCW trainers. Data were analysed separately for the trainers,

managers and other staff based on full transcriptions from semi-structured interviews and using Thematic Analysis.

Comparing themes across the samples, two cross-cutting themes were identified.

The first related to the valued roles of the trainers. It was clear that the trainers and managers/staff benefited from the training being co-produced and delivered by people with learning disability.

The second theme related to issues beyond the training itself. Managers and staff thought that in future the training would be most useful for newer staff members, and reported that they were currently engaging in increased reflection about their past and current practice as a result of having attended the training. Sharing difficult experiences within the WCW training had a cathartic effect for people with learning disability. Having a paid and socially valued role was important for the trainers with learning disability.

Finally, a post-WCW training 10-item evaluation questionnaire was completed by staff. Ratings suggested that the training was perceived to be enjoyable, and a good use of staff time. Staff agreed that being trained by a person with learning disability was an effective way to deliver training about challenging behaviour. The training materials and activities were rated as being appropriate, and staff felt that they had the opportunity to participate fully in the training. Staff generally thought that they would be able to apply the learning from WCW to their job and setting. Staff attending WCW training did not feel uncomfortable at any point during the training.

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EXPERIENCES OF PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES WHO WERE EMPLOYED AS TRAINERS ON THE WCW PROJECT

Trainers for the project were recruited between December 2015 and March 2016.

In April 2016, a three day train-the-trainer event took place. The train-the-trainer programme included: what the training is, how people learn, presentation skills, and communication skills.

Over the three days the views and experiences of trainers were combined with the knowledge and experience of teaching and training staff teams of the WCW team, and a further revision of the training package was made by the trainers.

As part of this, the term challenging behaviour was changed to behaviour, as one of the trainers said:

"It's just behaviour; if you do it, people say you are upset, if we do it, people say it's challenging behaviour".

The WCW training within the project was delivered in May, October and November 2016, and April 2017.

Throughout the project the trainers attended Project Steering and Advisory Group meetings.

Trainers identified personal benefits of being involved in both partnerships working and delivering the training:

The power of being able to share personal experiences and self-advocacy:

"I get a buzz when I tell them!"

"Some people listened."

"Who's Challenging Who? is important to let people know in other communities what we have to go through every day."

"My job is to be a voice for people with a learning disability."

Increased confidence:

"I like doing the training and talking to people, it gives me confidence in myself."

Increased social networks:

"Gets me out the house, it's like a day out and working at the same time."

Friendships were developed:

"I know he's always there for me".

Equal treatment:

"Were treated as equals".

One of the trainers described some interactions with the facilitator: "You have challenging behaviour too, you confuse me but I know you now so I can just tell you that you don't make sense!"

Being paid and having additional income:

"When you have done the training you have money to look forward to the next month."

"Being paid to do a job felt good."

"Being paid means we are respected for the work we do."

New experiences:

"Having a P60, and thinking wow I haven't had one of these before."

"It would be nice if it carried on so we had more work and the chance to go to different places."

"People think because we have a learning disability we can't do it, but we can"

Trainers identified appropriate support as a crucial component of being able to achieve and accomplish successes in employment and self-development:

"I probably would have backed out without the support."

"We might need to be told what to do, but once we know we can do it."

"[Without the advice] I would have sunk. [The advice was] encouragement to keep going and not give up."

"I was glad she told me about my mistakes so I could correct them".

CONCLUSION

The Who's Challenging Who intervention itself is short, low cost to deliver (approximately £360 for a group training of 6 staff, excluding trainee travel and staff replacement costs), has some positive outcomes, receives positive evaluations from staff, has no known adverse effects, and is demonstrably led by people with learning disabilities. Therefore, it has potential to contribute to the range of training staff are offered when working with individuals with challenging behaviour.

Although the effects were small to moderate in terms of size of effect primary and secondary outcomes, the training is only for a half day. Thus, WCW is unlikely to have large effects on practice – small changes, though, may make a difference to the quality of life of individuals with learning disability in social care settings. Such impact was not directly measured in the current research. Any training course needs to be considered as one of multiple strategies to drive culture change and outcomes for people with learning disabilities.

The research confirms evidence from the mental health field that creating socially valued, equal status and “intimate”, shared purpose contact with members of a devalued social group is an effective means to affect positive changes in attitudes. Thus, this general approach to attitude change for social care staff is likely to be important in practice settings – as well as for the general public.

The direct use of the experience of people with learning disability was perceived as a strength of WCW (by staff and by trainers); most, but not all, staff recognised that the person with learning disability was the lead trainer; and being involved in the research and delivering the training increased the confidence of the trainers and enabled them to recognise their expertise.

A part of the Transforming Care Policy Programme in England is a focus on the workforce needed to support the transforming care cohort of individuals with learning disability/autism with challenging behaviours. The current project shows that people with a learning disability themselves are a key part of the workforce needed under the policy programme, and that they could have a role in training other sectors of the workforce. People with learning disabilities have rarely been talked about as potential workforce assets under this and similar policy programmes.

REFLECTION

The study concluded that it is possible (and desirable) to carry out high quality randomised controlled trial evaluations of social care learning disability practice, and more evidence of this type needs to be generated and used as it is in healthcare settings.

This was the first RCT to evaluate co-produced staff training delivered by people with learning disabilities.

The study shows that attitude change interventions for social care staff can be developed: with a strong theoretical basis, draw on existing research findings, and at the same time incorporate the experiences of people with learning disabilities. Such interventions are not just a “good thing” in terms of their values-base, but can be described in detail (i.e., in a training manual) and their effectiveness tested robustly.

People with learning disabilities can also be supported to deliver manualised staff training, to a high standard, as a part of social care practice (and for research). A paper has been published by the WCW trainers about their experiences: Richards L, Williams B, Przybylak P, Flynn S (2018) The experiences of people with learning disabilities in co-produced challenging behaviour training, *Learning Disability Practice*, 21(4), 28-35.

Retention of social care staff in the research at follow-up points was challenging and this may need further thought in future social care RCTs, especially in terms of the infrastructure and culture relating to large scale social care research.

PROJECT OUTPUTS

Flynn S, Hastings RP, Gillespie D, McNamara R, Randell E (2019) Trainer and support staff experiences of engaging with the Who's Challenging Who? challenging behaviour training course, *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*, Online First.

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