

Case study: the hardest to help (mental illness)

RBLI

Harry (53) had been diagnosed several years previously as paranoid. He had not worked for nine years. He had had periods of severe illness but through his referral to a condition management programme via RBLI's Pathways to Work programme he was finding ways to cope with his illness. Harry's Pathways adviser understood he could not function in groups and could only be seen on a one to one basis.

Harry was convinced every conversation he heard or saw taking place was about him. His problem also meant he extrapolated generic facts to be about himself, for example when he heard on the news that 25 per cent of incapacity benefit claimants were obese and reliant on medication, Harry perceived himself as to be overweight and a drug addict.

He regularly cancelled his appointments as he was convinced people were watching him leave his house. Because of this, his adviser arranged home visits, or met him in his local coffee shop which was a familiar environment. When his adviser visited him at home, Harry would lock him and the chaperone in and draw the curtains.

After every advisory interview, Harry insisted on having the notes read back to him to be sure that nothing derogatory had been written about him. Through taking an open, honest and transparent approach, his adviser managed to establish a relationship with Harry over a number of weeks. The contact was intense in order to keep the momentum going and to stop doubts and negative thoughts creeping into Harry's mind. Harry had formerly worked in groundskeeping and held good qualifications, but he had had an incident which had led to him being sectioned. Although the incident had taken place a long time ago, Harry was still extremely nervous about returning to work.

After some time, Harry started his own self-directed job search and applied for a host of vacancies. His adviser, after checking the first few applications, was convinced he had good job search skills and wasn't self-sabotaging. Harry gained an interview for himself, and attended an intensive interview preparation session with his adviser the day before the interview. Harry was offered the job and asked to start immediately. However, it became apparent that he hadn't disclosed his mental health condition and so his adviser arranged to speak to Andy, the site manager.

Andy had some concerns initially but Harry's adviser went into detail about Harry's condition and how it could be managed. As Harry was present during this discussion, the transparency and trust which had been established was

maintained. Harry's honesty with his employer and Andy's support at this stage helped foster a stronger relationship between them. Andy arranged for a colleague called Joe to induct Harry into the company as Joe was to be Harry's dedicated work buddy and they would work in the same team on site. Harry and his adviser described Harry's symptoms and what to look out for if he started having a hard time or feeling overwhelmed by paranoia.

Andy and Joe were the only people in the company who knew about Harry's condition and they changed some protocols to accommodate him. These included giving him fixed hours to ensure he could continue to attend his condition management programme (CMP) without being challenged by other staff about leaving early, and arranging for Joe and Harry to work together every day together instead of being in different teams. It was important to Harry and his well-being at work that the other staff didn't know he was attending CMP or the Pathways programme.

Harry received in-work support calls every other day for the first two weeks. These then reduced to a weekly and then fortnightly basis. Joe says that now he knows about Harry's condition, he has learned to spot any early warning signs and can intervene when Harry feels others in the team are whispering about him. Joe believes he has prevented a number of situations which may have led to Harry being sacked.

Harry still attends his CMP and feels the coping strategies he has learnt there are proving invaluable. The CMP is also Harry's first point of contact if he gets stressed at work, followed by his RBLI adviser, and his GP. Harry comments: "Without RBLI's support, I'm sure I wouldn't be in work. The help and arrangements they have made are keeping me happy working every day."

Key learning points:

- The Adviser's integrity is crucial - honesty and transparency helps establish trust more quickly
- Disclose any issues as soon as possible and when the customer is comfortable
- Adviser intervention can be critical to the success of the customer in securing and keeping a role
- Work place buddies are an effective way to ensure the customer sustains in work (and not just because the customer has a health issue)
- With the right kind of approach and support, employers will see the benefit of taking on someone with age or health concerns due to the experience and qualifications they have.