

05. Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE)

Overview

- Psychologically Informed Environments (PIEs) deliver services in a way that takes into account **the emotional and psychological needs** of those using them.
- PIEs comprise **five elements**: a psychological framework, the physical environment and social spaces, staff training and support, managing relationships and evaluation of outcomes.
- Staff report they feel **better able to manage challenging beneficiaries** and tackle complex cases as a result of working within a PIE approach.
- Other benefits for the workforce include **enhanced skills, improved morale, increased resilience** and lower levels of staff sickness, absence and turnover.
- Commitment and **support to PIEs from senior and strategic managers** is needed for the approach to be successful.
- PIEs can provide a common purpose, approach and language that can **span diverse organisations and sectors**. This may provide a key mechanism for reducing ‘silo’ working.

What is it?

Psychologically informed environments, or PIEs, are services and support designed and delivered in a way that takes into account the emotional and psychological needs of the individuals using them.¹ PIEs are designed to enable non-clinical staff to better understand and respond to the emotional and psychological needs of people with multiple needs.² PIEs also focus on providing support for staff, so they are both more resilient and better able to support people with these needs.

There are five key elements to PIEs:³

- Relationships
- Staff support and training
- The physical environment and social spaces
- A psychological framework
- Evidence generating practice.

How are Fulfilling Lives partnerships delivering this?

Most partnerships have incorporated PIE within their work in some form, although only three partnerships have reported focused pieces of evaluation and/or learning relating specifically to PIE. From this evidence the greatest focus appears to have been placed so far on the staff training and support element. Partnerships have provided staff with specialist PIE training, including in psychological frameworks, as well as regular opportunities to discuss and reflect on practice. Less emphasis appears to have been placed on making changes to the physical environment, although some work has been done in this area. For example, Shelter in Birmingham have reconfigured their offices to provide quieter spaces as the high volumes of drop-in beneficiaries had contributed to making some feel anxious.

¹ Homeless Link (2017) *An introduction to Psychologically Informed Environments and Trauma Informed Care – briefing for homelessness services*. London: Homeless Link

² No One Left Out: Solutions Ltd (2015) *Creating a Psychologically Informed Environment – Implementation and Assessment* Westminster City Council

³ Op. Cit. p3

Fulfilling Lives Newcastle and Gateshead's PIE pilot

Fulfilling Lives Newcastle and Gateshead piloted PIE in three settings – a drop-in homeless day centre, an accommodation-based residential service and a residential mental health rehab and recovery unit. The pilot comprised:

- training sessions for staff
- fortnightly 90 minute reflective practice sessions for six months
- use of a psychological framework – the Ladder4life (see Figure 1), and
- an Open Dialogue approach – a person-centred model of mental health care, currently being used by a small number of NHS Trusts in England.

The first 20 or 30 minutes of the reflective practice sessions were used as brief training sessions covering the psychological framework, and topics such as personality disorders. The partnership is developing plans for future roll-out of PIE.

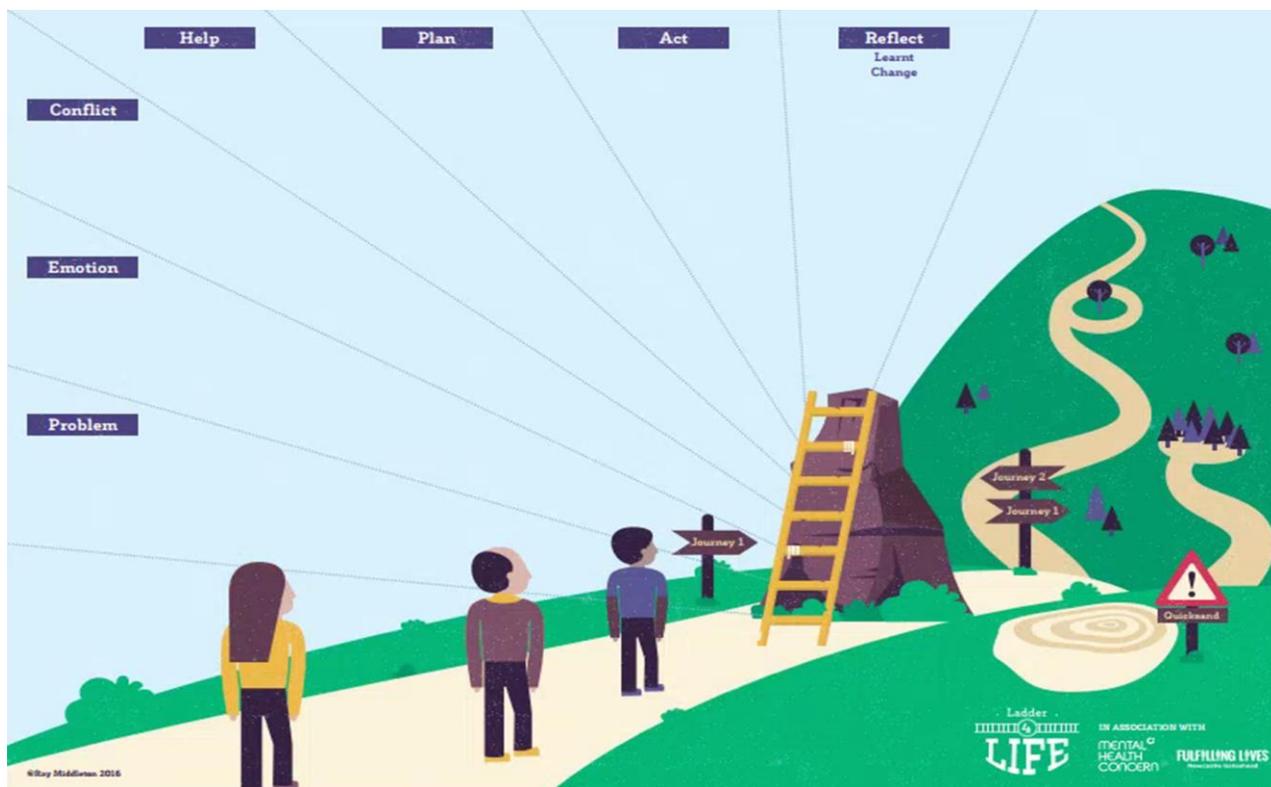


Figure 1: Ladder4Life – Newcastle and Gateshead's psychological framework.

What do the evaluations tell us?

Fulfilling Lives local evaluations provide useful learning about implementing a PIE and evidence of perceived impact on staff, particularly in terms of changes in their knowledge, skills, relationships, confidence, resilience and working practices. This is based on a combination of interviews and focus groups with service managers, staff and other stakeholders and surveys of staff participating in PIE training.

There is much less evidence on the impact on beneficiaries. However, Liverpool's evaluation provides information on selected beneficiary outcomes (such as planned positive moves) benchmarked against those for other, not fully psychologically-informed, services in Liverpool. While any differences in outcomes cannot necessarily be attributed to the PIE approach, this provides an indication of the possible impact of PIE, which could be further build on.

What is the evidence of impact?

All of the evaluations were positive about the impact of the PIE activity on the staff and the support they provide and there was a high degree of similarity in the types of benefits reported.

The more reflective perspective is believed to have contributed to improved care and outcomes for beneficiaries. Liverpool indicate that their psychologically-informed accommodation service had a much higher rate of successful move-on (93 per cent) compared to accommodation services across Liverpool more generally (65 per cent).

PIE can benefit...

...the way staff work with beneficiaries

Staff feel better able to **manage challenging beneficiaries** and tackle complex cases

Staff reported **more empathy** towards and greater awareness of the way in which they interacted with beneficiaries

They are enabled to **focus more on the person and less on the risks** that they might represent

Reflective practice provides an **opportunity for staff to share concerns and fears openly**

And to take a constructive and mutually supportive approach to **identifying potential solutions to complex problems**

...and the staff themselves

Being able to develop new approaches and better care gave staff **greater job satisfaction**

Training and reflective practice contributes to enhanced **skills**

Mutual support provides an opportunity to off-load and helps staff to realise they are not alone

This helps to improve **morale** and increases **resilience**

These all contribute to **lower levels of staff sickness absence and turnover**

...colleagues have been becoming quite disillusioned with the care they're providing. Quite often, we can go into a PIE and everyone can discuss new approaches; quite often we come out with renewed vigour, and refreshed and renewed and with a little bit better idea of how to proceed.

Staff participant, Fulfilling Lives Newcastle and Gateshead⁴

⁴ Boobis, S. (2016) *Evaluating a Dialogical Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) Pilot*. Fulfilling Lives Newcastle and Gateshead

Key learning

- All of the major reports on PIEs that we reviewed were unanimous in recommending that **commitment and support from senior and strategic managers** is needed for PIEs to be successful.
- This is particularly important as **dedicated time and space** is needed for reflective sessions and some initial investment in training is required.

Staff also need support to implement a PIE, with evaluations highlighting:

- The importance of enabling staff to **see benefits of the approach quickly**, which could be achieved by focusing on the most chaotic and challenging beneficiaries.
- The importance of **training** being provided by someone **suitably qualified**.
- The need for staff to have **multi-faceted skills** (such as self-awareness and ability to interpret psychological patterns) - staff recruitment should be extended beyond people with experience in homelessness as a way of achieving this.

How might this contribute to systems change?

The evaluations also suggest that a psychological framework can provide staff with a common language and a shared set of values – and this sometimes crossed organisational boundaries. Birmingham highlighted how the PIE training and reflective practice had helped to create a greater sense of teams working together towards a common goal.

PIE is an approach of how we can play our part to support the same person. Reducing the unhelpful rivalry and improving partnership working.
Stakeholder, Birmingham Changing Futures Together⁵

PIE could potentially provide a basis for overcoming the ‘silo’ working that can mean people with multiple needs do not receive the co-ordinated and holistic care that they need.

Although some of the initial pilots have come to an end, there is evidence that the benefits are sustainable and plans are in place to widen the reach of PIEs. Following

⁵ ABIC Ltd (2017) *A Review of the Impact of Birmingham Changing Futures Together on Systems Change*. Birmingham Changing Futures Together

their involvement in Liverpool's programme, the YMCA have invested in Cognitive Analytical Therapy (CAT) training for their own employees. Newcastle reports that the reflective practice sessions are continuing after the initial six months of investment and the pilot has influenced practice outside the day centres where it was piloted. Other partnerships are also seeking to widen the use of PIEs across partner organisations – for example, Golden Key (Bristol) have developed a PIE Assessment Tool and plan to engage partner services with this as part of their PIE strategy.

What next?

Due to the pilot-orientated approach to PIE adopted so far, evaluations published to date are relatively small scale and short-term. Given the number of Fulfilling Lives partnership that have implemented or are planning to implement PIEs, this is a potentially useful approach to explore further.

There is some evidence from the local evaluations that PIE can have a positive impact on staff resilience and empathy. The ways in which this could potentially have a positive impact on beneficiary outcomes is clearly articulated but the evidence on this could be strengthened through larger, longer-term studies with more robust methods, including comparison groups. PIEs are still emerging as an approach with increasing national interest, particularly in the homelessness sector. There is a clear opportunity for Fulfilling Lives to contribute further to enhancing the evidence base on their impact and effective delivery. Partnerships should continue to evaluate locally and the national evaluation team should consider conducting a more detailed evaluation of the role and impact of PIE within the Fulfilling Lives programme.

Further reading

ABIC Ltd (2017) *A Review of the Impact of Birmingham Changing Futures Together on Systems Change* Birmingham Changing Futures Together

Boobis, S. (2016) *Evaluating a Dialogical Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) Pilot* Fulfilling Lives Newcastle and Gateshead

Nolan, A. and Butler, S. (no date) *Liverpool Waves of Hope Accommodation Based Service: Lessons from a Psychologically Informed Approach* Liverpool Waves of Hope