

Hope theory of service user and issue based change

Northampton Hope is an agency which works with people in poverty, including some people experiencing severe, multiple disadvantage whom are affected by a range of social, economic and health problems related to their circumstances and behaviour.

Hope's day centre clients are amongst the most excluded people in society; shunned and on the margins.

Theories of how they got there, and how services might respond:

- 1) One simple explanation offered is that our service users behave in such a way that has taken them outside the mainstream, through crime, anti-social behaviour, laziness or substance misuse. This has made them economically unable to support themselves. They bear responsibility.
 - Services should try to instil self-responsibility and make people share accountability for their actions. Services should be conditional upon full compliance.
- 2) Service users do bear some responsibility for their actions but they are caused by factors not entirely of their making; they should be regarded as sick and damaged:
 - What they need is therapy and support which they nevertheless must comply with.
- 3) Poverty and structural and economic disadvantage drive a sub-set of people into impossible situations where mental ill-health, offending and substance misuse are survival mechanisms which in turn trap them where they are.
 - Services should try to enable people to escape the problems they face in a non-judgemental way, whilst requiring some personal responsibility and compliance. Services to meet basic needs should be made available to encourage compliance and behavioural change, not follow or be conditional upon personal change. At the same time services should campaign against the structural causes to try to prevent them, not assuming that individually focused work is the solution to these.
- 4) The offer of charity re-enforces the oppression and exclusion of people affected by entirely structural issues, so the response should solely be political action and campaigning against them, not the offer of purely alleviatory fig-leaves that let government and capital off the hook.

Hope's perspective

Hope operates within the third model. We work to try to break the cycle of behaviour and exclusion by constructive encouragement of change combined with practical help to alleviate suffering and campaigning.

Our role in relation to therapeutic change

Hope is not primarily an agency providing specialist 'therapy' for specific issues. We do not have the skills nor capacity to provide the higher kinds of therapies to address significant specific issues like child sexual abuse and complex addiction problems, even though our services do make significant impact on them through what we do offer and how we do it. We are not a medical agency and cannot prescribe or offer those solutions. However we support change through referring people to specialist interventions, enabling and supporting them, and help re-inforce change plans, and offering support ourselves, someone to talk to, and

theory based interventions promoting change behaviours. We achieve significant change in confidence and self-esteem through the giving of practical things, offering support, helping people access new skills and opportunities, and befriending. Our qualified social work and occupational therapists, plus their students in training, ensure that very real professional skills towards change occur. We have a high level of expertise in motivating change using a specific motivational skill set; and have a high level of experience with mental health and addiction problems, particularly amongst pre-contemplative users.

However we do have a specialism in helping people achieve training and greater employability. We have considerable staff experience and competence in helping people get work and motivating them to do this.

Developing people's potential to campaign for change in the structural causes of their situation

Hope will campaign against the causes of problems we deal with – poverty and homelessness - but we do not do this solely *on behalf of* the people we support: we help them to do it *for themselves*. We offer courses, skills and information to help them understand the issues they face, so they do not worsen their situation by internalising responsibility for things they cannot change (the price of housing, for example); we enable opportunities for people to speak to people who have power; we coach people how to conduct themselves in self-promotion and advocacy for their problem. We give voice to lived experience. This can include encouraging people to volunteer, and work for us after they control the issues they manage.

The value of work

A simplistic model assumes that the main, or best way out of poverty is to get work, so our promotion of work to our service users enables this change.

Hope's view remains that work has considerable value, for health, confidence, self-esteem, avoidance of harmful behaviours and the potential of adequate income to live by. As such we will continue to try to help people into work, to get skills and improve their employability.

However we also recognise that with regard to the cost of housing, fuel, travel and food, wages have not kept pace, meaning that work very often is not a route out of poverty; people in work are still poor. As a result whilst we continue to promote and offer work as a desirable outcome for people, we accept that it is not a simple, or sometimes even a real solution to the issues of poverty.

Social work methods and theory

Hope is broadly a social work agency. Social work practice in classical theory has three elements: individual casework, groupwork and community work. Practically, much social work practice today operates within the first of these only and the interventions can be perceived as fitting with model 2 above. Hope offers interventions across all three areas, arguing that only by doing all three can an agency operate within the model 3 above, where our work achieves both individual and societal change, not work focused on enabling individualised service user accommodation with structural forces that in part caused their problems.