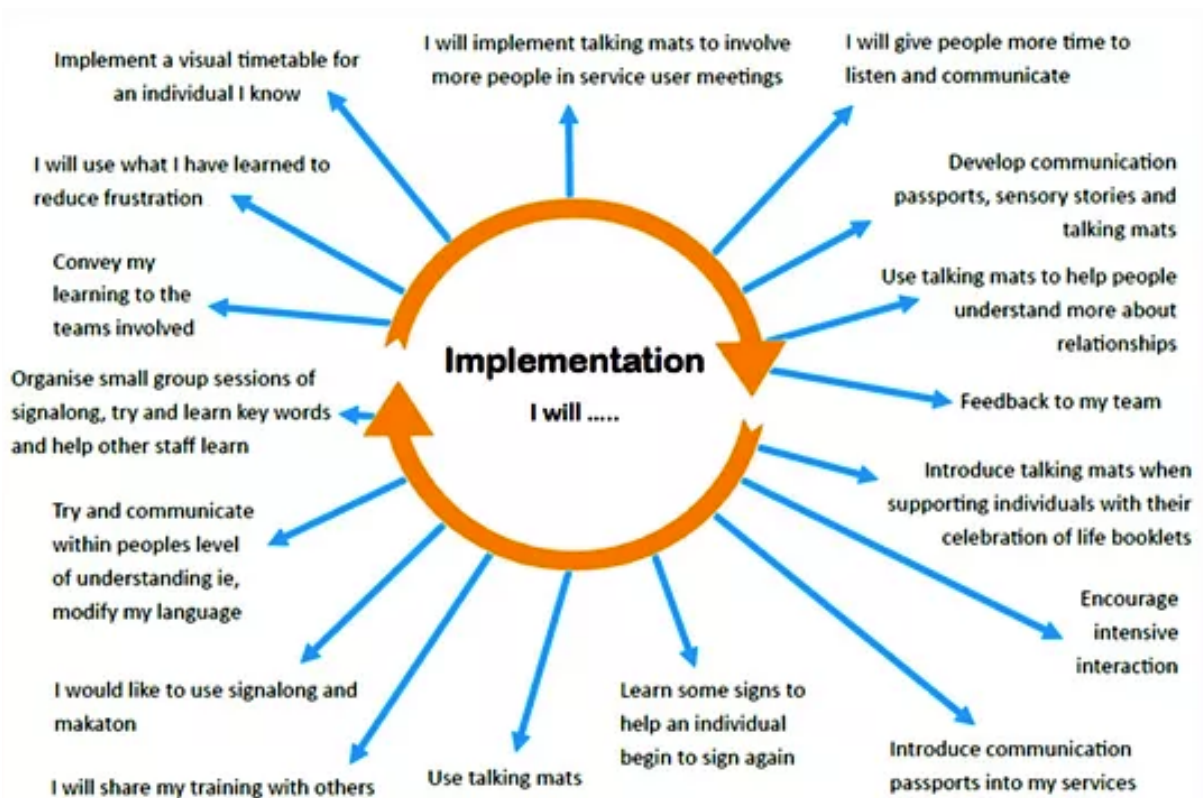


Gathering views -where I live, implementation of communication strategies following training

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We recently provided person centred communication training for support staff in a north west service, we had three great days with enthusiastic and innovative staff. We are passionate about our training being implemented in the workplace and that it makes a difference to the lives of people with learning disabilities so we spent some time discussing their goals and planning out what they would like to introduce. Their ideas are listed below.



Talking Mats can be used to help people to talk about complex ideas, the use of symbols or pictures can help support this discussion. Mind-mapping is used to think through the vocabulary which might be needed to discuss the topic and then symbols for each topic are created, we used Boardmaker symbols and we created some basic guidelines which supported the information given in the training session. The top scale is important and can influence the way a discussion goes, feeling ok versus not ok, important versus not important are some of the options for the top line. We picked a neutral image of thumbs up versus thumbs down and removed the writing on the symbol.

The example mat below shows that the topic symbol placed at the bottom of the mat with a red border and the top scale in place. Support staff in the service were taught to give or show their conversational partner the symbols one by one and to use open questions to ask how the person felt about the item. Questions such as “What do you think about?” or “how do you feel about....?” are preferable to closed questions such as “do you want....?” or “do you like...?”. When using mats for consultation, this also ensures the listener (in this case the support staff) remain as objective as possible.



There are lots of ways Talking Mats can be used, however we are mindful they won't work for everyone. If the person you are using them with has limited language in terms of their understanding, it may be that they will be able to use the mats to discuss concrete choices in the here and now such as what to have for tea or what to drink but they may struggle with decisions which are more abstract or in the future, such as where to live.

We wish the service all the very best in gathering views and giving people a voice.

For information about the consultation resources, our person centred communication training or Talking Mats training please contact alison@totalcommunication.org.

They were particularly concerned about recent local developments which may involve people with learning disabilities having changes to their accommodation. We discussed how we could try to gather views from the people who use their service and what attempts had been made to find out how people felt about where they lived. The group felt Talking Mats would be an ideal means for some people to express their views. As we are a Community Interest Company with a particular interest in advocacy we offered to help by creating the resources they needed to discuss the topic 'where I live' on a Talking Mat. Talking mats are a useful way of discussing topics and they can be used to help people make choices or to give an opinion.