

## UNIQUENESS

This dimension is about how we adapt the resources we have and others have to meet the unique needs of the people we serve. There are very particular challenges that the person centred manager has to overcome.

The fact that an individual's unique gifts, preferences, wishes, and needs may also need to be supported and not just the person's clinical needs is a relatively new idea in the human service world.

In the past when people used the word uniqueness they may have been referring to the unique impairment, condition or label that the person had been assigned. In that sense, being unique meant that you were marked out into a different class. By uniqueness we mean to accord more attention to the whole person and to value the uniqueness of all people, including ourselves.

Changing focus to think in new ways about people has been made difficult by the expectation that managers in the past should be able to justify why it is that people are the same rather than why people are unique and different. You may have had to justify the existence of a service for people who have the same label living or spending their days together when the rationale for doing so was no longer valid.

Unfortunately we still come across commissioners advocating that support organisations meet only the basic needs of the person in their work, following the protocols. Right from the start of service then the manager may need to be a good advocate for person centredness.

Re-read the text on UNIQUENESS and ask what qualities, skills, attitudes are required in your management role in order to support the UNIQUENESS dimension.

We have highlighted two areas as being worthy of particular attention. The first area is that of imagination and creativity, finding ways to envisage a different set of possibilities. This area is fully discussed in the Imagination handout in the block two text. The second area is around collaboration.

### **Collaboration.**

To collaborate means to co-operate, concur or combine forces. This is essential when arranging support to meet uniqueness – here are some of the reasons a recent focus group of supported living managers told us they valued a collaborative approach

- many new ideas will require the breaking of new ground and someone else may already know how to do it or be able to help
- being able to learn quickly from others who are thinking similarly
- new ways of working may demand the trial of untested ways of doing things and if others think it is also a good idea then you have more confidence
- the more ideas the better (hard to be creative on your own all the time)
- shared risk taking is usually easier

We asked the same group of people recently what hindered collaboration for them personally and they said...

- Lack of confidence – fear of being seen to be unable to do it alone

- Not wanting to be seen as being part of a dissident group
- Not knowing how to make the first move
- Not sure who they could trust
- Uncertainty about the organisations standpoint and whether they would be backed up
- Not knowing what to trade.
- Having been badly let down in the past

So the task of managing individuals and teams in a person centred way has to include collaboration. Collaboration has to take place within teams but it must also occur outside of the work place. Person centred organisations are always struggling with difficult issues and welcome contact and collaboration with the wider world. We have to keep talking and thinking about how to support people uniquely and the sharing our concerns and issues with people external to our own agencies can really help us to be more imaginative and creative.