



HOW AI SUPPORTS RECOVERY AND PIE_s* IN HOSTELS

(PSYCHOLOGICALLY-INFORMED ENVIRONMENTS)

Background

This summary draws on work piloted in King George's Hostel and rolled out to other Westminster hostels during the last two years, and is the winner of an Andy Ludlow award. It's the basis of a paper for **Housing Care and Support Journal**, [Organisational development, AI and the development of Psychologically Informed Environments \(PIEs\) Part One: a positive psychology approach.](#)

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) provides organisations with a strength-based team building and Organisational Development (OD) approach, and offers staff a psychologically advanced model for working from their own strengths and those of their clients.

What follows is a summary of what has been observed in practice:

1. It is unique in being an OD approach which supports organisations while at the same time having an excellent record in supporting personal development. It requires 'whole system' commitment but has 'whole system' benefits
2. It delivers tangible results. The application of AI has delivered good outcomes for clients – even in entrenched cases (examples available from King George's and St Mungos)

3. It supports reflective practice for both clients and residents
4. It is immensely practical and although less costly (in time and money) than most therapeutic approaches it has many evidenced therapeutic type benefits. In particular it supports wellbeing and resilience, and it draws extensively on the emerging field of positive psychology (see appendix for references).
5. It contributes to an increased climate of trust and respect, both between staff and between staff and clients. It creates a genuine feeling of 'we are working together' between staff and residents – that raised level of trust encourages resident engagement.
6. It supports creativity and innovation in both clients and staff
7. Although it works from and emphasises strengths it doesn't ignore challenges. These get addressed in a creative way, and generally in a way that builds morale rather than saps it.

Key benefits to clients:

1. It offers them an alternative way of thinking, and a way of moving beyond their painful past
2. They don't feel as though they are a 'problem' which the service is addressing – rather they are individuals with resources of their own
3. It helps them consider their strengths
4. It helps them generate a viable vision for their next step, and identify where they might get support from.
5. It supports and enhances their resilience to deal with what life may bring (and in their chaotic lifestyles this is a very valuable tool). We draw on *The Seven 'Learnable' Skills of Resilience* (Dr Karen Reivich)
6. The reflective practice that it encourages gives them a valuable tool to process emotions and deal with times when life doesn't seem to go how they want it to.

Examples of client outcomes noticed to date in Westminster service users:

1. reduced substance use
2. health improvement
3. engagement with services
4. development of reflective practice
5. improvement in managing their emotions
6. reduction in ASB and emotional outbursts
7. improvement of relations with family and friends
8. successful move on to independent living

Back on Your Feet: a summary of AI-based work in King George's 2010-2012

A new approach to working with service users in a positive and strength focused way, using Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to build resilience in hostel residents (theory indicates that resilient individuals 'bounce back' from stressful experiences more quickly and effectively). AI has been used as an intervention to improve the self-esteem, motivation, and aspirations of hostel residents. It includes structured, positive conversations used in a group or individual session, art activities such as

creating a vision of an ideal future, and individual development work such as keeping a gratitude journal.

The project has developed an effective model to apply AI in any hostel/supported housing setting. The project started at King George's hostel (a high support hostel specialising in working with chaotic drug users) and has now been rolled out into a variety of hostel settings across Westminster with excellent sustained outcomes.

The model developed begins with 2-3 days of staff training in AI where staff also reflect on their personal development and work on a vision of their future work in their own scheme. Many staff then incorporate AI into their approach and innovate in their day to day work. For example a staff member from King George's has described changing her approach to working with a client from the 205 (long term rough sleepers) list and being very successful with him.

Some key benefits for staff

1. As training it supports staff communication and relationships. It offers opportunity for new ways of relating to each other and to clients
2. It offers a great foundation for working with and relating to patients/service users. In particular it provides a way of engaging with them as equals and encouraging them to share valuable information and experiences in a positive framework. It allows a way of meeting challenges and of reframing them where this is appropriate.
3. It supports team building. (See Losada's reference in appendix for evidence of the power of positive feedback on teams)
4. It unleashes creativity
5. It contributes to organisational and staff resilience and towards being a great learning organisation
6. Recent Organisational Development research and writing confirms the benefits of this strength based and inspirational approach to coping with personal and organisational uncertainty and change¹. People and organisations become more resilient, and able to harness and grow their strengths. They can work more effectively and take more informed decisions about personal futures. A recently published book documents many examples of successes².
The focus on strengths and the positives support wellbeing and morale (and therefore lower absenteeism and staff turnover). Marcus Buckingham's first book is the basis of the strengthsfinder work – *First, break the rules – what the world's greatest managers do differently*, by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman. This book identified that an employee's weaknesses cannot be removed by training – all training can do is provide ways to manage the weaknesses. The successful manager builds on people's strengths.
7. The appreciative approach can be applied to many parts of an organisation's work – eg appreciative supervision and coaching, teambuilding, team meetings, and 360 feedback

¹ For example – *Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination* by Jane Magruder Watkins, Bernard Mohr and Ralph Kelly, 2nd edition (2011) and *Appreciative Inquiry for Change Management: Using AI to facilitate Organisational Development* by Sarah Lewis, Jonathon Passmore and Stefan Cantore

² *Positive Psychology at Work : How positive leadership and Appreciative Inquiry Create Inspiring Organisations* by Sarah Lewis, 2011

Appendix – some key resources that this work references and draws on:

1. *Guidance on Psychologically Informed Environments*
2. Martin Seligman's *Flourish: A New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being — and How to Achieve Them*
3. Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton: *Now discover Your strengths – How to develop your talents and those of the people you manage* (2005)
4. The Value of Positive Emotions: The emerging science of positive psychology is coming to understand why it's good to feel good. Barbara L. Fredrickson (2003) July–August
5. Barbara L. Fredrickson: *The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions.* American Psychologist 56:218–226 (2001)
6. *Resilient Individuals Use Positive Emotions to Bounce Back From Negative Emotional Experiences.* Michele M. Tugade and Barbara L. Fredrickson
7. Losada, M. & Heaphy, E. *The role of positivity and connectivity in the performance of business teams: A nonlinear dynamics model.* American Behavioral Scientist, 47 (6), pp. 740–765 (2004)
8. *The Resilience Factor: 7 Keys to Finding Your Inner Strength and Overcoming Life's Hurdles* Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatte
9. Jackie Kelm: *The Joy of Appreciative Living*
10. *Organisational development, appreciative inquiry and the development of Psychologically Informed Environments (PIEs). Part I: a positive psychology approach – Abstract*
11. *Organisational development, appreciative inquiry and the development of Psychologically Informed Environments (PIEs). Part II: the pilot study and evaluation – Abstract*

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