

Case Study – Louis (Name Changed for reasons of confidentiality)

(Case Study written and presented by Project Manager Valery Small).

Start Date: June 2008

Leave Date: January 2009

Background

Louis is a 55-year former carer from Hackney. He is an only child, academically gifted obtaining 13 O-levels and four A-levels. He read Chemistry at University and, still an undergraduate, was recruited by the Laboratory of Government Chemists. In 1974, following promotion he took a 12-month career break to care for his mother until his father retired and take over the care.

As he expected his role to be short-term, he did not join any support network or apply for welfare benefits. Louis had to delay his return to work because his father became ill. He was eventually diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and by 1976 Louis was full-time sole carer for both parents. A combination of overwhelming responsibilities, pride and ignorance meant that he did not seek help.

In the ensuing years the few family members he had moved away from London and by the mid-80s he became totally isolated. His father died in 1993 and his mother in 2005. He remembers very little of the years up to then except that his days were relentless and dominated by lists. He remembers getting panic attacks and believes that must have been when his 'nervous breakdown' started. After the death of his father he made several attempts to find a job but none of these lasted.

At the death of his mother he was mentally and physically exhausted; the family savings was exhausted, utility and housing bills were in arrears and on the day of the funeral bailiffs arrived to repossess the house. After the funeral with no home or money and a court order hanging over him for non-payment of Council Tax, his life spiralled downwards and he began sleeping rough eventually coming to the notice of the mental health services. By the time he joined Care2work he was lacking in confidence and self-esteem. He had limited work experience, few transferable skills and was angry and frustrated.

Project Intervention

Louis contacted Care2Work at the beginning of June 2008 after seeing a poster in a Mind shop. At his initial advice and guidance session he explained that he was looking for a job in finance, preferably as a stockbroker. As he had no experience of banking or finance and had not worked for over 20 years the adviser suggested that he attended the 3-day Employability skills workshop where he would be able to explore options. He attended the workshop as well as one on Ageism in the Workplace and agreed that a stockbroker position was perhaps unrealistic. He explained that he liked and was good at maths and agreed to work placement while continuing to assess his skills to find suitable employment.

He arrived at the office 09:45 one morning, a week ahead of a scheduled progress review. He was clearly distressed and agitated and looked as if he had slept in his clothes. He continuously muttered to himself as he walked up. He was seen by the project manager- a qualified experienced psychiatric nurse. Louis explained that he

had been mugged, was 'scared' that his life falling apart and had stopped taking his medication, because it was 'messaging with his mind. As he became more relaxed and admitted that the reason he came was that he finds it difficult to face an entire week without planned activities for each day. He panicked that morning when he woke up to a blank diary page.

Signposts & Referrals

Clearly Louis needed expertise that was not available in Wise Owls. We worked out a daily and weekly action plan with him and encouraged him to drop-in the office at anytime and for scheduled progress review every two weeks. We also advised him to contact his Community Link worker and to continue his medication until he sees his doctor.

We also signposted him to City & Hackney Mind for general mental health support who could help sort out his benefits and housing; Law Works a community legal support agencies for advice about his housing, CCJ and other issues; Lee House and Remploy both of which offered personal development and confidence training for people with disabilities including mental illness.

By October 2008 Louis had been re-housed and had booked sessions with a therapist. He was now getting all the benefits he was entitled to and although he still owed money he no longer expected to be arrested. The housing issue was also sorted and he was no longer threatened with eviction. In terms of current job search, he had submitted several applications for admin officers, library assistants, researcher and to M16 as a 'trainee spy'.

Destination

By now he had also attended workshops at both Lee House and Remploy and was in a position to decide in favour of Remploy. He selected Remploy because he felt that they understood people with mental illness, they had nice facilities. We agreed with his choice and had no reservation making the referral. We have a good relationship with Remploy. We know that they are experts at dealing with jobseekers with disability/mental illness and have an extensive network of support providers on whom they can call for particular services to match their clients' needs. Although the referral was made immediately it was not until January 2009 that Louis finally went over to them. In the interim, we continued to support him by phone and email.

We are disappointed that we were not able to find Louis a job. However we are proud what we have achieved. We have all noted the progress that he has made over the last six months. Compared to when he joined the project, he is more confident and realistic, he laughs a lot, crucially at himself. For instance his attitude to the M16 application (tongue in cheek) was totally different from his initial demand for stockbroker jobs.

He still has a lot of anger and bitterness at the loss of lost career opportunities to deal with and also a huge amount of guilt for being mad for being ill at such a crucial time in his life. Remploy has the expertise to help him address these issues and so remove another major barrier for him to finding employment.

There has been personal changes too in that he has started to think about himself again; his appearance has improved. A positive side-effect of all this is that his medication has been reduced.